

The City in the Novels of Fu'ād al-Takarlī

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To My Parents

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the Iraqi writer, Fu'ād al-Takarlī, reveals the complex and intimate dynamics of Iraqi society from the early 1960s to the mid 1980s, in his three novels, *Al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, *Khātam al-Raml*, and *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*. The author's treatment of space and time throughout each novel is analysed - with particular reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism - in terms of the significance of chronotopes; the relationship between a character, his environment, and the links between the dichotomies of public and private space and the historical political situation.

The introduction provides the context to the three novels under discussion which form a trilogy. A summary of the contemporary history of Iraq, al-Takarlī's place within the development of the Arabic novel, and a survey of the critical framework adopted by this study is presented here.

The following three chapters each analyse one of the novels, charting the erosion of the city (Baghdad) as a haven of familiarity and culture via the emergence of an aggressive political force (the Ba'th Party), which takes advantage of social decay. The role of the city increases throughout the trilogy as it becomes a metaphor for the state's manipulation of identity.

This thesis advances the view that al-Takarlī casts the city as a microcosm of the whole of Iraq and the members of the families he portrays as allegorical characters who represent classes, generations or physical embodiments of the nation.

The conclusion sums up the trilogy's exploration of identity through geography and presents a case for its intended function as both a historical document and a remedial tool for overcoming the trauma of the past. It is argued, above all, that the novels emphasise the empowering idea of a unified cultural identity of the Iraqi people.

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Introduction

The Author and His Work

Fu'ād al-Takarlī (1927-)¹ is regarded as one of the most important contemporary writers of Arabic literature for his bold handling of Iraq's contemporary political and social problems through the medium of short stories,² novellas,³ drama,⁴ and novels. This thesis

¹ For further information about the writer, see: W. Walther, "Fu'ad al-Takarli" in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. II, Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (eds.) (London/New York, Routledge, 1998), p. 755; Appendix 1: the personal account of the author's career sent to me by Fu'ād al-Takarlī, translated into English; Father Robert B. Cambel al-Yasū'ī, "Fu'ād al-Takarlī" in *A'lām al-Adab al-Mu'āṣir Siyar wa-Siyar Dhātīyyah*, Vol. I (Beirut, Markaz al-Dirāsāt lil-'Ālam al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir, Jam'iyyat al-Qidīs Yūsif, 1996), pp. 396-397. Catherine Cobham in the *Translator's Note* that appears at the beginning of *The Long Way Back*, gives a brief account of the writer's life. She tells us: "Fuad al-Takarli was born in Baghdad and graduated in law from Baghdad University in 1949. He worked in the Ministry of Justice and was made a judge in 1956 and rose to be head of the Court of Appeal in Baghdad. In 1983, he resigned from this post to devote himself to writing. He studied law in Paris from 1964 to 1966 and lived briefly in Paris again during the 1980s. Since 1990 he has lived in Tunis. In 2000, he was awarded the prestigious Owais Prize for the Arabic Novel." Fu'ād al-Takarlī, *The Long Way Back/al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, translated into English by Catherine Cobham, (Cairo/New York, American University in Cairo Press, 2001), pp. vii-viii. The writer moved to Syria in 2003 and he is currently living in Damascus. A French translation of his novel *Al-Raj' al-Ba'id* was published by J. C. Lattes under the title *Les de l'aube* in 1985. His short stories have been translated into a number of languages such as French, Spanish, Croatian and English. Ibid., p. viii.

² The following are the first publications of al-Takarlī's subsequent short stories, according to 'Abd al-Ilāh Aḥmad, *Al-Adab al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-'Irāq Mundhu al-Ḥarb al-'Ālamīyyah al-Thānīyyah: Ittijāhāt al-Fikriyyah wa-Qiyamahū al-Fanniyyah*, part 2 (Baghdad, Manshūrāt Wizārat al-I'lām fī al-Iraq, 1977), pp. 283-320: "Hams Mubham," was published in *al-Adīb* (Baghdad, December 1951), p.39, a collection of al-Takarlī's short stories including one novella was published in 1960, taking the name of the novella: *Al-Wajh al-Akhar* (Beirut, Dār al-Ādāb, 1960); "Al-Dimlah," *Al-Hiwār* (September-December, 1966), p.136; "Al-Tanūr," *Al-Adab* (Beirut, April 1973), p.93; "Al-Ṣamt wal-Luṣṣūs," *Gallery* (July, 1968), p.64; "Sympathy," *Al-Jumhūriyyah* (No. 1335, 1972); "Umsiyat Kharif," *Al-Adīb* (Baghdad, March 1952), p.12; "Al-Ghurāb," *Al-Adīb* (Baghdad, March, 1962), "Ghurabā'," *Adab* (Beirut, Spring, 1962), p.19. Fu'ād al-Takarlī, *Al-A'māl al-Kāmilah al-Qaṣaṣīyyah* (Damascus, Dār al-Madā lil-Thaqāfah wal-Nashr, 2002) contains all the author's short stories from 1950 to 1999.

³ Fu'ād al-Takarlī, *Baṣqah fī Wajh al-Hayah* (Cologne, Al-Jamal, 2000); *Al-Wajh al-Akhar* (Beirut, Dār al-Ādāb, 1960); translated into French by Odette Petit and Wanda Voisin under the title of *L'autre Face* in 1991. *Baṣqah fī Wajh al-Hayah* was written in 1948-1949, but was not published until 2000, *Al-Wajh al-Akhar* was published in 1960 in 'Abd al-Ilāh Aḥmad, *Al-Adab al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-'Irāq Mundhu al-Ḥarb al-'Ālamīyyah al-Thānīyyah: Ittijāhāt al-Fikriyyah wa-Qiyamahū al-Fanniyyah*, op.cit., pp. 284,298,328. These two novellas were recently published in a single edition: *Al-A'māl al-Kāmilah: Baṣqah fī Wajh al-Hayah/Al-Wajh al-Akhar* (Damascus, Dār al-Madā lil-Thaqāfah wal-Nashr, 2001).

Baṣqah fī Wajh al-Hayah: The core of this story is about a father who falls in love with one of his daughters - Fāṭimah - and tries to force her to have a sexual relationship with him. When she refuses, he kills her.

discusses his three sequenced novels, demonstrating through its analysis that together they form a heroic saga, portraying the upheavals of the twentieth century in Iraq and the accompanying frustration of the Arab and Eastern nations. The novels are:

- *Al-Raj' al-Ba'id*: 1980.
- *Khātam al-Raml*: 1995.
- *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*: 1998.

These three novels are discussed as sequenced novels because first of all, they were published in sequential years. Secondly, the period that these novels cover the period of time in the history of modern Iraq, which begins with Iraq's independence from the British colonialisation until the beginning of the Iraq's-Iran War, with a slight throwback in time through the writer's hint to the country's ancient history (the Sumerian era). Thirdly, the theme of these three novels is the political changes that happened in Iraq as a result of that historical progression, which affected the social and cultural life in the whole country. This fact was portrayed through al-Takarli's special and emphasis on Baghdad as the capital and the nerve-centre of Iraq. Al-Takarli depicts such a theme through the relationship between the main characters in these three novels and Baghdad during the phase of changes that affected the complete map of the city from all its different aspects: politically, socially, culturally and architecturally. The connection that each character had with the city, and the kind of progression that took place in their personalities (Midhat/Hāshim/Tawfiq), influenced the way that this study understood these novels. This point may function towards establishing a basis for treating those three novels could be 'trilogy'. They form a 'trilogy' because the main

Al-Wajh al-Akhar: The focus of this story is the character of Muḥammad Ja'far, who cannot see beyond himself. He refuses to help a sick man whom he happens to meet in the street, divorces his wife who lost her sight as well as their first baby while giving birth, and then agrees to have a sexual relationship with their neighbour Salimah, the young woman who was forced by her mother to marry an old rich man.

⁴ Fu'ād al-Takarli, *Al-A'māl al-Kāmilah al-Masrahiyyah* (Damascus, Dār al-Madā lil-Thaqāfah wal-Nashr, 2002). All Takarli's previously published plays from 1969 to 1999 are included in this collection.

theme of these novels as this study will show is the recent Baghdad and its new map that had been formed, which makes Baghdad the real protagonist of these novels during its modern age. The relationship that connects al-Takarlı's main characters with Baghdad and the way their personalities developed as a result of the conflicts that happened in the city, leads to the conclusion that all of the three main characters share similar traits to the extent that they seem to melt into one character. Such a character, is almost reborn in every one of those three novels. This point will be explained through applying the carnival theory of Bakhtin, as it will be shown in the following chapters of this study, at some level, these novels that are studied here not only form a 'trilogy' but also a modern 'heroic saga', where Baghdad and its own faithful and patriotic inhabitants try to develop a kind of stronger resistance as a way to stand up to all the negative aspects of the historical change.

The Idea of A 'Trilogy'

In the beginning it is very important to mention the literary meaning of 'trilogy'. In *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 'trilogy' is defined as:

"(Gk 'set of three') A group of three tragedies presented by individual authors at the drama festivals in Athens in the 5th c. Bc. The practice was introduced by Aeschylus, whose *Oresteia* is the only complete trilogy extant from that time. More recent examples are Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (c. 1592); Schiller's *Wallenstein* (1799), Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), which was a reworking of the Oresteian theme; and Arnold Wesker's *Chicken Soup with Barley, Roots and I'm Talking about Jerusalem* (1960). The term may also be applied to a group of three novels linked by a common theme and characters. A good modern example is Joyce Cary's *Herself Surprised, To be a Pilgrim* and *The Horse's Mouth* (1941-4)."⁵

⁵ J. A. Cuddon (revised by C. E. Preston), *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London, Penguin Books, 1998), p. 945.

The same definition, almost, is repeated in *The New Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of The English Language*: ". . . a series or group of three plays, novels, operas, etc., that although individually complete, are closely related in theme, sequence, or the like."⁶ Although al-Takarlı has never claimed that the above-mentioned novels form a series, there are four observations supporting this idea. The first is that the novels were published consecutively over two decades. The second is that each novel focuses on a family in its intimate setting in the old quarters of Baghdad. Albeit, not the same family, the techniques used to portray its members as representative of certain Iraqi generations or social classes and to cast the protagonist in conflict with his social and political milieu, are the same. Thirdly, all three novels treat the cultural aspects of life in Iraq as being tightly connected to the national and regional political situation, whereas al-Takarlı's other works tend to deal with these subjects separately.⁷ The last and main point here, is that all of the events take place in Baghdad, showing how the city transformed through different phases in a short period of its modern history, which makes the modern-day Baghdad the main protagonist of these three novels. So through demonstrating such a point in the analysis of *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, *Khātam al-Raml* and *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, we can realise that the real idea of 'trilogy' is inherent in this fact. So from the above mentioned definitions and at the same time as this study shows, these three novels of al-Takarlı form between them 'trilogy'. At the same time there is a large similarity between the kind of trilogy that they form and the technicality that is known for the critics who deal with the modern Arabic narrative work in the famous and well known 'trilogy' of Najīb Maḥfūz (*Mā Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*, *Qaṣr al-Shūq* and *al-Sukariyyah*). In dealing with the main aspects of the modern political and cultural issues in the country's capital during a specific and sequenced duration of its historical period,

⁶ *The New Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English Language* (Gramercy Books, New-York, 1997), p. 707.

⁷ *Khātam al-Raml* is a novella not a novel, but the thesis connects it to both *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* and *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* because it is related to them by its time of publication, the period that it treats and the subject that it deals with.

the effect of the political and social changes are revealed on a certain family from the large middle class section that forms the main features of the society in Cairo.

The Treatment of Themes and Devices

The central focus of this study is al-Takarlı's treatment of space and time in the trilogy. The following chapters will present a reading of each novel with close reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of polyphony, carnival and chronotope. Bakhtin's theories will facilitate an examination of the novels and the voices in the novels, the relations between them, and the era or worldview symbolised by each one. The argument advanced here will be that, taken together, the three novels form the author's attempt to express and influence the external socio-cultural status quo. Vital to this agenda, is al-Takarlı's treatment of urban geography and intimate spaces - mainly in the city of Baghdad - and their linkages to psychological states, identity and heritage. Al-Takarlı's 'writing' of the city will be elaborated in the light of Franco Morretti's theories on the relationships between the novel and political geography and between class structure and urban settings. Interiors settings will be discussed with reference to Gaston Bachelard's thought on our emotional relationship with intimate space.

While focusing on these devices from an artistic and technical point of view, no modern critical study can afford to ignore the historical context of the novel. We must also discern the place of al-Takarlı's novels in the context of modern Arabic literature and to an extent the place of the novel in Arab literary tradition.⁸ In this introduction, a review of contemporary Iraqi political history will show how turbulent times have impacted on the life of the author and formed his narrative agenda. Al-Takarlı's style

⁸ For detailed discussion of modern Arabic literature, see: Aḥmad al-Hawārī, *Naqd al-Riwāyyah fī al-Adab al-‘Arabī al-Ḥadīth fī Miṣr (1870-1938)* (al-Haram, ‘Ayn lil-Dirāsāt wal-Buḥūth al-Insāniyyah wal-Ijūmā’iyyah, 1993), p. 31; ‘Abd al-Muḥsin Ṭāha Badr, *Ṭatawwur al-Riwāyyah al-‘Arabiyyah al-Ḥadīthah fī Miṣr (1870-1938)* (Cairo, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1984), p. 7; Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative*

and place in literature will be briefly considered in view of realist, cultural and modernist thought. The importance of the place of geography in the novel will follow, concluding with an outline of the main theories and their relevance to the trilogy.

The Author's Life in its Historical and Literary Contexts

Al-Takarlı uses history in his writing to give us an insight into modern identity and conflict, in and beyond Iraq.⁹ After the Ottomans, the British, the Hashimite royal family, the Free Officers, the Ba'th Party and now a new kind of occupation have all undertaken to rule over this region, which comprises of distinct ethnic and religious identities such as Shi'ite Arabs in the South, Sunni Arabs in the Centre and Kurds in the North, with minority Christian Arabs, Jews, Turkomans and others in the North and Centre - at times disregarding differences, at others subsuming identities under a common nationality or manipulating them for political ends. These identities are of great importance in al-Takarlı's novels, but are explored together with the layering of and conflict between the tribal, religious, pan-Arab, nationalist and class identities manifested in Iraq at an individual as well as societal level. This layering of identities transcends Iraq and can be readily grasped in most other Arab countries.

Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature (London, Saqi Books, 1993), pp. 215-229.

⁹ The factual, information on this part is taken from: Matthew Elliot, *Independent Iraq: The Monarchy and British Influence, 1941-1958* (London/New York, Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), pp. 5-9; Geoff Simons, *Iraq from Sumer to Saddam*, foreword by Tony Benn M. P. (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 1-76, 237-295, 299-346; Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89* (Oxford, St. Antony's/Macmillan Series, 1991), pp. 1-47, 18-29, 30-40, 263-283; Dilip Hiro, *Iraq: A Report from the Inside* (London, Granta Books, 2003), pp. 25-26, 35-49, 51-70, 71-94, 95-136, 137-153, 155-222; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (London, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 1; Ḥanā Baṭāṭū, *Al-'Irāq: al-Ṭabaqāt al-Ijtīmā'īyyah wal-Thawriyyah min al-'Aḥad al-'Uthmānī ḥattā Qiyyām al-Jumhūriyyah*, translated by 'Afīf al-Razāz, the original name of the book in English is: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, Vol. I (Beirut, Mu'assasāt al-Abḥāth al-'Arabiyyah, 1995), pp. 21-71; Ḥanā Baṭāṭū, op.cit., Vol. II, (focusing on the Iraqi Communist Party), pp. 61-115; Ḥanā Baṭāṭū, op.cit., Vol. III, (the Iraqi Communist Party, Ba'th Party and The Free Officers), pp. 29-177, 289-389, 398-425; 'Akīl al-Nāsiri, *'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim fī Yawmihi al-Akhīr: al-Inqilāb 39* (Beirut/Damascus, Dār al-Ḥaṣṣad, 2003), pp. 31-211, 213-472; The Ministry of Information in Iraq, *The 1968 Revolution in*

Iraq declared independence in 1932, although the British continued to exert a heavy influence through economic ties and military back-up for the newly installed government. The militarisation of Iraqi identity began with King Fayṣal's creation of an Iraqi army and his cementing of an Iraqi national identity. Conscription was introduced in 1934 and this was to have a profound effect of putting power in the hands of those it armed - many of whom were discontented with their status. Degenerating economic conditions during the 1920s was one of the factors leading to the emergence of an Iraqi Communist Party in 1929.

The new national consciousness that had begun to develop, especially among the middle and lower class Shi'ite, Christian, Turkomans and Kurds who had no links to the government in Iraq and presented the minority rule, prompted the beginning of a long struggle in the country. The main opponents in this struggle were members of the Communist Party and the British installed administration, led by the Hashemite Royal Family. Its aim was to improve the economic and political equality in the country and link Iraq to the rest of the Arab world. This kind of awareness was nurtured in the older neighbourhoods of Baghdad, such as the Bāb al-Shaykh quarter, where al-Takarlı grew up. In his novels, Bāb al-Shaykh and other ancient quarters of the capital feature as symbolic links between the political activists and their intellectual heritage.¹⁰

The writer himself, at the beginning of the *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah*, which includes both of his well known novellas: *Başqah fī Wajh al-Hayah* and *al-Wajh al-Ākhar*, describes his difficult life financially, socially and politically as a young man in Iraq especially after the death of his father.¹¹ Born in 1927, his early life must have been dominated by the debate about self-determination, anti-colonialism and later Arab nationalism. In this

Iraq: Experience and prospects, the Political Report of the Eighth Congress of the Arab Baath Socialist Party in Iraq, January 1974 (London, Ithaca Press, 1979), pp. 15,75.

¹⁰ Bāb al-Shaykh is located in the very centre of Baghdad. It belongs to the older part of the city, which is located inside the old wall built during the Abbasid period.

¹¹ See *Al-A'māl al-Kāmilah: Başqah fī Wajh al-Hayah/Al-Wajh al-Ākhar*, op.cit., pp. 11-17.

period, al-Takarlī read a lot of Russian and European literature and his technique was clearly influenced by Dostoevsky.¹²

Both Allen and Moretti have tied the development of the novel to the rise of the nation state. "The nation-state . . . found the novel. And viceversa: the novel found the nation-state. And being the only symbolic form that could represent it, it became an essential component of our modern culture."¹³ Of the development of the Arabic novel, Roger Allen says that the prevalence of the historical novel has continued, at first set in a glorious past, encouraged by the surge in nationalist pride, but later, directing a more critical eye on traditions and morality in the contemporary past.¹⁴

The Ba'th Party was established in 1952 and became one of the most important nationalist parties in the anti-imperialist struggle in Iraq and the Arab world. It soon began to rival the Communist Party and in fact adopted some of the economic principles of the Communist Party, but without attempting to undermine the existing foundations of the petite bourgeoisie. Similarly, its members were derived from the lower and middle economic classes and the sectarian minorities, although the Shi'ite - in spite of their disaffection with Iraq's governance - were weakly represented.

Another nationalist movement began to emerge in 1957, but this time it was inside the Iraqi army and therefore equipped with the power to change the status quo. Its members were known as the Free Officers (al-Ḍubāt al-Ahrār). The soldiers were acutely aware of the corruption rife in the country. Resentment towards the whole political situation grew despite the fact that most of them were Sunni Arabs, like the ruling family, and therefore received generous salaries and tremendous privileges from the government as a way of guaranteeing their loyalty. Eventually, a coalition of the

¹² Dostoevsky's influence on al-Takarlī is mentioned by 'Abd al-Ilāh Aḥmad, op.cit., pp. 287-297.

¹³ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel (1800-1900)* (London/New York, Verso, 1999), p. 17.

¹⁴ For further information, see Roger Allen, "The Mature Arabic Novel outside Egypt" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*, M. M. Badawi (ed.) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 194.

Free Officers, Communists and Patriotic Democrats in the army planned a revolution against the Hashemite Royal Family. Led by 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim and spontaneously joined by the people of Baghdad, a bloody revolution took place on 14th July 1958. Although victorious, Qāsim then faced an increasingly detrimental internal conflict over the issue of 'The United Arab Republic' recently formed by Egypt and Syria and whether Iraq should join it.

The conflict was exacerbated by outside powers. The Egyptian government of 'Abd al-Nāṣir took the side of the Ba'th and the Nationalists against Qāsim's preference for more local independence. This conflict between the two most important Arab countries brought in the Soviet Union, which had political interests in both Iraq and Egypt. Then, to add to this increasing tension, the inflammatory role of British Imperialism, in its death throes, conspired to dominate Iraqi oil resources. 'Abd al-Salām 'Ārif, a high-ranking non-Ba'thist military figure who was Qāsim's second in command, then formed a collaboration with sympathetic parts of the army and the Ba'th Party in plotting a coup against Qāsim. When 'Arif died in 1966, his brother 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Ārif assumed the presidency and remained in that position until July 1968 when the Ba'th Party overthrew him. Headed by Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr and his co-leader, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn, the Ba'th Party eliminated all soldiers belonging to opposition parties and conducted a purge against the Communist.

After the political and social upheavals of the 50s and 60s, socialist-realist novels appeared, taking a concrete stance in conferring value on certain social norms with the intention of effecting change. "[As] the Arab world begins to challenge the hegemony of European colonialism and to play a much larger role in its own destiny, so the novel, as reflector and even catalyst of change, assumes a more significant role."¹⁵

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 193-197.

Shortly before Ṣaddām's ascent to power, Israel's overwhelming defeat of the Arab countries in 1967 left Arab Nationalism in crisis. It was at this juncture that al-Takarlī became interested in writing about the political situation of his country and in connecting it to problems of the wider Arab world.¹⁶

Ṣaddām and al-Bakr remained in power from 1968 until al-Bakr stepped down leaving Ṣaddām complete authority in 1979. This led to a brutally oppressive totalitarian state that produced two unnecessary and economically ruinous wars in the region and was finally toppled by a third: the American-led coalition invasion in the spring of 2003. As is now well-documented, the thirteen years of UN sanctions between the end of the 1990-1991 Gulf War and the end of the Ba'th regime, coupled with Ṣaddām's successive purges and suppressions, led to the severe degradation of Iraq's material, social and psychological infrastructure. Al-Takarlī resigned from his position as judge in 1983 to dedicate himself to writing. Although al-Takarlī's novels, written between 1980 and 1998, did not cover this more recent period, its effects on his writing and on his reasons for writing are discernible.

Three consecutive wars, political insecurity, and the violence done to cultural life, have left deep wounds in the minds of the Iraqi people, the cumulative effect of which is perceptible in al-Takarlī's trilogy. It is a feeling of being defeated, shattered and looted of their ancient heritage, which, as the origin of both their own civilisation and many of the great civilisations of mankind, has always been a source of pride and inspiration for rejuvenation.¹⁷ And thus, to remedy the Iraqi - and to some extent, the Arab - malaise, al-Takarlī turns back to history. We will find that he explores the subject of ancient Iraq and the Sumerian civilisation in a very deliberate way, emphasising continuity between the people of ancient and contemporary Iraq. For example, he attributes the

¹⁶ See 'Abd al-Ilāh, *Al-Adab al-Qaṣaṣī fī al-'Irāq Mundhu al-Ḥarb al-'Ālamiyyah al-Thaniyyah: Ittijāhātuhū al-Fikriyyah wa-Qiyamahū al-Fanniyyah*, op.cit., p. 289.

¹⁷ For further information about the war's affect on people, see John Limon, *Writing after War: American War Fiction from Realism to Postmodernism* (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 3-8.

characteristic of the Sumerians to the progenitor of the 'Abd al-Mawlā family who are the subject of *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, as well as linking Iraq's history with the history of the contemporary Arab world since the beginning of the 20th Century.¹⁸

Since the 1970s, themes for the Arabic novel have become more diverse and complex as the genre entered maturity. The influence of the themes of pride in the Arab and Islamic heritage and social-realist critique can be felt in more recent historical novels like al-Takarlī's, as well as a new emphasis on identity, the multiplicity of identity, cultural interaction and personal introspection. Al-Takarlī's sparing use of the authorial voice and multi-narrative nature of his novels exemplifies a modernist phase, in which the novel's form reflects a recognition of the competing versions of history and morality.

This study will show the extent to which the genre of the novel has developed by al-Takarlī as a main medium to express all the complex political and social issues in an Arab country such as Iraq since the era of al-Nahḍah in Arabic Literature. In fact al-Takarlī and his generation are considered to be the real generation who developed strong existence and bases for the novel as a genre in the Arab world after it has been found by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's and Najīb Maḥfūz's generation. Al-Takarlī emphasises in his novels the discussion of the political and social conflicts of his country through this genre which places him with all the great Arab writers who shared the same concern in their writings, such as: Ḥannā Mīnah, Ghā'ib Ṭu'mah Farmān, Ghassān Kanafānī, Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, Emīl Ḥabībī and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf. Al-Takarlī's novels that are treated in this study are as equally important as the works of the mentioned writers, such as: *al-Maṣābīḥ al-Zurq*, *al-Shirā' wal-'Āṣifah*, *al-Nakhlah wal-Jirān*, *Rijāl fī al-Shams*, *Mā tabaqqā Lakum*, *'Ālam bi-lā Kharā't*, *al-Ghuraf al-Ukhrā'*, *al-Safīnah* and *al-*

¹⁸ See Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (London/New York, Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 1-2, 66-69, 76, 80-98. For further information also, see pp. 104-117, 122-138, of Roux *Ancient Iraq*; S. H. Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology: from the Assyrians to Hebrews* (London/New York, Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 18-64; Geoff Simons, op.cit., pp. 77-87; Amatzia Baram, op.cit., 30-40.

*Waqā'i' al-gharibah fī-Ikhtifā' Sa'id Abi al-Nahs al-Mutashā'il.*¹⁹ Al-Takarlī achieved his literary position among the Arabic writers after achieving a significant position between his colleagues in Iraq who established the foundation of the Arabic narrative in Iraq; influenced by the classical narrative work in Arabic literature, al-Nahḍah movement in the Arab world especially in Sirya, Egypt and Lebanon, and by the European narrative work especially by the genre of novel.²⁰ Such as: 'Aṭā' Amīn, Salyman Fayḍī, Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid, Ākūb Gabrā'il Sāmī Khūndah, Murād Mikhā'il, Anwār Shā'ul, Na'im Ṭawayyaq, Yūsuf Makmal, Mayīdah Yūsuf, 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Amīn, Shalūm Darwīsh, Yaqūb Balbūl, Sa'diyyah Yaḥyā, Yūsuf Mattā, Ibrāhīm Rafīq, Ja'far Ḥusay, Nadīm al-Aṭraqjī and 'Abd al-Ḥaq Fāḍil.²¹ The main subject for the Iraqi writers was similar to that of the rest of the Arab writers. It was about expressing the social and the political situation of their country and nation for the sake of building a better future.²² Al-Takarlī was successful in portraying the problems of his society very well showing the amount of his attachment to it, just as most of the Iraqi writers.²³

The way in which the Arabic novel progressed with the help of writers like al-Takarlī proves what R. Allen said about it that:

"Once the nations of the Arab world had achieved their independence, the need to establish a sense of self-identity as a nation and, in some case, to cement new alignments developed within the revolutionary process, was a primary stimulus in the emergence of a tradition of social-realist

¹⁹ See Roger Allen, "The Beginning of the Arabic Novel" and "The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt" in M. M. Badawi (ed.), op.cit., pp. 180-222.

²⁰ 'Abd al-Ilāh Aḥmad, *Nash'at al-Qiṣṣah wa-Taṭawarahā fī al-'Irāq* (Baghdad, Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wal-ʿIlām fī al-'Irāq, 1968), pp. 3-21.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 46-53/66-74/78-108/165-175/297.

²² Ibid., pp. 35-53.

²³ Presented by: 'Alī Jawād al-Ṭahar and 'Abd al-Ilāh Aḥmad, *Al-Majmū'ah al-Kāmilah li-Qiṣṣah Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Sayyid* (Baghdad, al-Jumhūriyyah al-'Irāqiyyah: Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wal-Funūn, 1978), p. 10.

fiction which would trace the development of the independence movement and identify the social underpinnings upon which the new era would be built."²⁴

The Place of the Novel

The novel is a relatively new genre in Arabic literature and its development can be linked to the interaction of Arab countries with Europe and their rejection of colonialism and self-assertion through politics, which was embodied through the Nationalist movement.²⁵ Therefore, the Arabic novel of today rests on a tradition of revolutionary thought and identity politics. Sabry Hafez writes:

"In modern Arabic literature the close interaction between literature and socio-political issues makes it difficult to isolate one from the other. The importance of the socio-cultural dimension is particularly relevant in dealing with narrative forms, because narrative mediates human experience and derives its significance from probing it."²⁶

The novel is worthy of examinations here as it is the genre most suitable for the scope of al-Takarli's modernist, revolutionary, and remedial aims. It became al-Takarli's vehicle for expressing the accumulated political and social experience of his society on a grander scale than anything he could have achieved through the short story or play. With the novel, al-Takarli could afford to expand the themes that had occupied him and write about Iraq with detail that would make his characters universal and their condition resonate with the rest of the Arab world. With its vast potential for expressing, intertwining, and juxtaposing different narratives, the novel can be seen as the most appropriate of all genres to express the complex issues of the entire Iraqi nation in the modern age. As Susan Lohafer concludes in her study of the short story, "[stories]

²⁴ Roger Allen, "The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt", op.cit., 206.

²⁵ For a broad discussion of the effect of Arab nationalism on literature, see: Roger Allen, "The Beginning of the Arabic Novel" and "The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt" and also Hilary Kilpatrick "The Egyptian Novel from Zaynab to 1980" in M. M. Badawi (ed.), op.cit., pp. 180-269.

prosper in times of social upheaval and in places where individuals are alienated."²⁷ Such times and places have engendered the stories of al-Takarlı's characters, but in the novel he is able to inter-link many stories, whilst providing the broad historical background that gives each of these stories a universal significance. Our understanding and classification of al-Takarlı's appropriation of the novel to his themes and purposes require further explanation, as they underpin this study's analysis of time and space in the trilogy.

In their portrayal of characters, al-Takarlı's novels appear to fit into the category of realism, in that:

"[t]he central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations. What makes a type a type is not its average quality [but rather] that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development, in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete peaks and the limits of men and epochs."²⁸

The author shows himself acutely aware of the individual natures and vulnerabilities of his characters, but almost always links these with the wider issues that affect all Iraqis, so creating archetypes whose meaning transcends their personal predicament. However, al-Takarlı does not reject the dominant world-view, nor focuses on victims of history and the dark side of human nature.

The specific themes, descriptions and narratives of the novels that form this trilogy make them novels of revolutionary change, inasmuch as they "invalidate the hypothesis

²⁶ Sabry Hafez, "The Modern Arabic Short Story" in M. M. Badawi (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 270.

²⁷ Susan Lohafer, "Introduction to Part 1" in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (eds.) (Louisiana, Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 7.

²⁸ Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, translated by Edith Bone (London, The Merlin Press, 1972), p. 6.

that there is a conflict between art and political commitment.”²⁹ Al-Takarlı’s descriptions of interior and exterior space in all three novels are politically charged - they aim to provoke a desire for change. Jean Paul Satre says: “the writer can guide you and if he describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and provoke your indignation,”³⁰ meaning that the real aim behind the writer’s descriptive adventure is to support or justify a certain set of values above others - in this case, to appreciate the value of living in a just world where people can live in dignity.³¹ However, political commitment in al-Takarlı’s case does not mean the espousal of one particular ideology over another, but rather provoking a critique of political practice and social norms. This encourages the reader to question the values attached to the places he describes and makes the empowering cultural connection between their history and inhabitants. In this sense, the trilogy fulfils Barakat’s description of literature as that which “can subordinate politics to creative and reflective thinking and undertake the task of promoting a new consciousness.”³²

Drawing together these ideas, it is the opinion of this thesis that al-Takarlı’s novels were written to effect a change of mindset - allowing others to understand Iraqis and Iraqis to understand themselves - thus helping to build a foundation for cultural renewal. In this sense, we can consider the uses of the novel as a form of spiritual journey. Paul Fiddes says that the genre of the novel is unique in its ability to: “turn a mass of facts into fiction through the use of the imagination . . . [to] follow the consequences of actions and choices through exploring situations, showing us our dilemmas . . . and enabling us

²⁹ Haleem Barakat, “Arabic Novels and Social Transformation” in *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, R. C. Ostle (ed.) (London, Aris & Philips LTD., 1975), p. 137.

³⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature and other Essays*, with an introduction by Steven Ungar (Cambridge/Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

³² Haleem Barakat, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

to feel them as well as to know them.”³³ Thus, the writing or reading of a novel is “[t]o be attentive to the other,”³⁴ which is to be “both an act of unselfishness and of liberation at the same time.”³⁵

Using the novel in just this way, al-Takarlı transmits to his readers exactly what it felt like to live in Baghdad at a specific time and thus to make them understand what Iraqis have gone through.³⁶ It is only through this process, where the author eliminates all possible obscurity surrounding certain experiences that the reader is able to attain a kind of self-knowledge that comes with empathy with others, whether or not she/he belongs to the described society or not.³⁷ There is much evidence to suggest that al-Takarlı intended his three sequenced novels as an inner journey for its Iraqi and Arab readership, to attain such self-knowledge and thus begin to overcome the cultural and psychological breakdown that had paralysed both art and political consciousness in the author’s land.³⁸

Al-Takarlı, as a writer with a moral message to his nation and to the rest of humanity, chose to write novels that deal with a very painful historical period in Iraq. His trilogy enables fellow Iraqis to face up to this pain, undergo a catharsis and ultimately shake off their bitterness. It can be said that: “writing becomes a human act, which connects creation to history or to existence.”³⁹ It is this act that makes demands on its readers, upon whom it may act as a positive transformation that could “be accomplished only in full view of society.”⁴⁰ The three novels, taken in sequence, could be understood as a

³³ Paul S. Fiddes, “Introduction: The Novel and The Spiritual Journey Today” in *The Novel: Spirituality and Modern Culture: Eight Novelists Write about their Craft and their Context*, Paul S. Fiddes (ed.) (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 13-14.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁶ On the subject of transmitting the atmosphere of the environment of a certain place through the novel, see Jill Paton Walsh, “The Blizzard of Circumstances: Writing and Moral Discovery” in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), op.cit., p. 55.

³⁷ See Sara Maitland, “Religious Experience and the Novel: A Problem of Genre and Culture” in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), op.cit., p. 81.

³⁸ On literature as a tool produced for self-knowledge, see Jean Paul Sartre, op.cit., p. 45.

³⁹ Roland Barthes, “Writing and the Novel” in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (eds.) (London, Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

course of treatment of the paralysis of hope and inspiration amongst Iraqis, the release of which would allow them to envision a better tomorrow.⁴¹ "[T]elling stories is a universal human urge. It helps us make sense of our lives. It gives shape to our experience."⁴² A good novel is created from intimate observation and experience,⁴³ which enables the author to write an empathy and compassion that enable the reader to divine a truth that informs the essence of our existence.⁴⁴ Therefore, the novel can help to heal us of the spiritual and emotional pain that we encounter during our life in the company of others.⁴⁵ It can also help defeated human beings - (as this study will argue) - defeated nations to recognise the value of their existence and give them courage "to face the supreme ordeals of life."⁴⁶

In terms of theme and technique al-Takarli can be considered a modernist writer,⁴⁷ using competing narrative expressed through his characters and their environment. Of al-Takarli's short stories, Hafez writes:

"Takarli has full range of modernistic themes, such as the various forms of political repression and their impact on society and the individual, the brutalities of life and man's ability to act against himself, and the ability of simple people to cherish rich and complex feelings or to manifest heroic qualities which gives their failure a tragic dimension."⁴⁸

⁴¹ See William Horwood, "The Novel and the Safe Journey of Healing" in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), op.cit., 42-44,156.

⁴² Catherine Fox, " 'Telling the Old, Old Story': God and the Novelist as Creator" in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), op.cit., pp. 99-100.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁴ See Susan Howatch, "A Question of Integrity: Stories and the Meaning of Wholeness," in Paul S. Fiddes (ed.), op.cit., pp. 123,128.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁶ William Horwood, op.cit., p. 152.

⁴⁷ For an illumination of modernism in literature, see: Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, Duke University Press,1987), pp. 4-92; Peter Nicholis, *Modernism a Literary Guide* (London, Macmillan Press LTD,1995), p. 5-41,251-278; David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London, Arnold, 2000), pp. 125-245.

⁴⁸ Sabry Hafez, "The Modern Arabic Short Story" op.cit., pp. 321-322.

The novel allows the author to interweave these themes into a far more ambitious epic. One could also argue that far from being on loan in Arabic literature, the novel is in constant intertextual dialogue with its precursive genre - the Arab heroic epic, related through mainly oral or poetic forms.⁴⁹

Al-Takarlı is part of that strand of modernism which "casts the self as bearer of a troubled history and makes writing a medium in which different temporalities intersect."⁵⁰ Writing "[that] occupies a space between historical memory and imaginative construction - a space which [the] writer begin[s] to define as 'myth' and 'epic'."⁵¹ The trilogy's time span is the beginning of the twentieth century up to 1981. It forms a dialogue with Iraq's ancient history, especially in *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, in order to question contemporary political and social issues in Iraq. Here, attention to the author's treatment of space and time become crucial.⁵²

Al-Takarlı presents all such issues through the genre of novel because of its highly and heterogeneous artistic technicalities; and the city of Baghdad is his vehicle for doing so very effectively.

" In contemporary fiction, as in poetry, the city, and particularly the capital city, emerges in works such as these as 'a center of exploitation and misery, of social injustice and political intrigue' (to quote Salmā al-Jayyūsī), and that uneasy relationship provides modern Arabic fiction with a further extension of the countryside theme. In the Maghreb the transfer of the farming community to the

⁴⁹ For further information about the novel's technique, see: Gérard Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 3 and Ross Chambers, *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*, foreword it by Wald Godzich (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 3, 9-10.

⁵⁰ Peter Nicholis, op.cit., p. 253.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 253.

⁵² The difference between space and place: "[a] ccording to Paul Walker Clarke, 'the capitalist creation of *space* is the homogenisation of a locale, and the discursive identification of *place* is the distinction of locale. Clearly *space* has the potential to become *place*. Likewise, *place* can be divested of human discourse and be rendered as space.' To extrapolate, place confers identity, while space lacks character." Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing The Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*, cited from unpublished work by Paul Walker Clarke-quoted with author's permission (Charlottesville/London, University Press Virginia, 2000), p. 157.

city created social problems for each. Thus in 'Abd al-Ḥamid ibn Ḥadūqah's (b. 1929) early Algerian novel *Rīḥ al-Janūb* ('South Wind', 1971), the topic is not only the tension between city and village as reflected in the decision of Nafisah, an eighteen-year-old girl, to go to the city to receive an education, but also the traditional attitudes forced upon her by a compulsory marriage to an older man. In a prize-winning novel, *al-Ṭayyibūn* ('The Good Folk', 1971), Mubārak Rabī' analyzes the nature of Moroccan society and illustrates the same tension, but within the context of the city. Here the land and those who live on it and by it are essentially pawns in the hands of landowners living far away. However, the novel which probably best conveys the remoteness and alien nature of the city within the life of those who work the land is 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's remarkable *al-Nihāyāt* ('Endings', 1978, trans. 1988) in which, against the graphic backdrop of the desert itself, the entire community of the village of al-Ṭība, and especially its eccentric hunting champion, 'Assāf, struggle valiantly against the terrifying forces of nature. Token visits from family members living in the city, bringing promises of a new dam, are greeted with a cynicism born of neglect and both spatial and attitudinal distance."⁵³

In these three novels, al-Takarlī follows the traditional Arabic fiction in the sense that it treats the subject of the city through its civilisation, which produced many conflicts and contradictions in the lives of its inhabitants because of the nature of its unstable progression. Al-Takarlī depicted all these facts by treating Baghdad and its inhabitants as representative of the whole country and its people, creating in these three novels Baghdad as his main protagonist, and illustrating how the authentic features of the original map of the city changed through becoming exposed to all those various political and social complications in a short span of time in its modern history. Even the other cities and villages that al-Takarlī mentioned in these novels were only a medium to reveal the extent of deformation that happened in Baghdad as a result for the degenerate political practices that affected all aspects of life in the whole of Iraq.

So in Arabic literature:

⁵³ R. Allen, "The Mature Arabic Novel Outside Egypt", op.cit., p. 209.

"[w]ith regard to the treatment of place, for example, the city in the Arabic novel, as in other traditions, serves as the primary location. While in many works of fiction it serves as a nurturer to its inhabitants, this period in Middle Eastern history also shows it swallowing up the many 'outsiders' who venture inside its walls. It is also the place of change, often focused on the educational institutions which it fosters. Nafisah, the provincial girl in Ibn Hadūqah's (b. 1929) *Rīḥ al-Janūb* ('South Wind'), can no longer tolerate or obey the dictates of tradition once she has gone to Algiers to study . . . Throughout the Arab world a generation of young people are shown attending schools and universities in the city and then returning to their homes to face the frustrating prospects of bringing about change in the face of tradition and entrenched interests. One particular city, the capital, is also the seat of government, and it is from there that the city endeavours to impose its societal agenda on the provincial way of life. In those countries with elaborate agricultural networks, the confrontations and crises caused by this situation naturally become a prominent topic for the novel."⁵⁴

Critical Theories to Illuminate al-Takarī's Novels

Polyphony is a Greek word that means many voices,⁵⁵ and this theory springs out of the idea of dialogism. In Bakhtin's opinion, "[w]hat we seek is a representation . . . of the inescapable dialogical quality of human life at its best. Only 'the novel', with its supreme realization of the potentialities inherent in prose, offers the possibility of doing justice to the voices other than the author's own, and only the novel invites us to do so."⁵⁶ Polyphony deals with the aesthetic construction of the different voices and the different ways of speaking in one text, known as 'Heteroglossia'. Each one of these voices should be independent from the others' domination, interacting freely on an equal

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 217.

⁵⁵ See Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester/New York, Manchester University Press/St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 112.

⁵⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Caryl Emerson (ed.) and the Introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. xxii.

footing. Once we understand the nature of the polyphonic novel, we are better able to analyse each of the voices: the hero, the main characters and the author, seeing how their world-views conflict, compete and enrich our understanding of the culture and history brought to life by the text.⁵⁷

The hierarchy of Iraqi culture is manifest in al-Takarlī novels, as this study shows, through the aspect of polyphonic interaction between the different characters and the author, not only by their different voices and heteroglossia, but also by their physical reactions, which indicate the extent of their acceptance or rejection of the prevailing culture. This leads us to Bakhtin's second theory in this study, known as carnival.⁵⁸

Carnival theory explains how the different characters in the novels are helped, through the plot, to develop and progress through a process of change and renewal. Al-Takarlī shows how the people and the city were forced to behave according to the rules of the Ba'th. The protagonists of the novels are inclined to fight against those rules.

"Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mood of interrelationship between individuals*, counterpoised to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of non-carnival life. The behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of hierarchical positions (social state, rank, age, property) defining them totally in non-carnival life, and thus from the vantage point of non-carnival life become eccentric and inappropriate. *Eccentricity* is a special category of the carnival sense of the world, organically connected with the category of

⁵⁷ For more on heteroglossia in the novel, see: Sue Vice, op.cit., pp. 112-148; Gary Saul Morson and Cary Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford/California, Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 231-268; Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 82-104.

⁵⁸ Bakhtin's theory of carnival is expanded in: M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist (ed.) and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2000), pp. 146-242; M. M. Bakhtin, "Rabelais and His World" in *The Bakhtin Reader Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, (trans.) H. Iswolsky, Pam Morris (ed.) (London, Arnold, 1994), pp. 194-244; Janet Harbord, "Identification's edge: dreams, bodies and the butcher's wife" in *Psycho-Politics and Cultural Desires*, Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord (eds.) (London, U. C. L.

familiar contact; it permits - in concretely sensuous form - the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves."⁵⁹

Al-Takarlı's novels allow the reader to observe the transient nature of social norms and political hierarchies through depicting their rapid change in times of revolution. From one novel to the next in al-Takarlı's trilogy, we see similar characters reappearing, given a fresh chance to influence their destiny. Bakhtin differentiates between carnival and the limiting discourse of post-medieval literature from Romanticism to Symbolism, in which "the wholeness of triumphant life . . . is lost,"⁶⁰ where "life is unrepeatable and death an irredeemable end."⁶¹ The concept of rebirth taking place between the novels and the use of communal public space as the setting for action and interaction in the novels can be understood in terms of carnivalisation,⁶² although it must be remembered that al-Takarlı is far from a writer of carnivalesque literature - his characters always remain constrained by their social and material circumstances.

Finally, and most importantly for this study, is the theory of chronotope. This word is a combination of two Greek words, 'chronos' meaning time and 'topos' meaning space.⁶³

"Bakhtin describes the chronotope as the means of measuring how, in a particular genre or age, 'real historical time and space' and 'actual historical persons' are articulated, and also how fictional time, space and character are constructed in relation to one another. In some chronotopes, mainly those of travel, and uprooted modern life, time may take precedence over space, in the more idyllic, pastoral chronotopes, space holds sway over time."⁶⁴

Press/Taylor and Francis Group, 1998), pp. 182-183; Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, op.cit., pp. 433-470; Sue Vice, op.cit., pp. 366-412.

⁵⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 123.

⁶⁰ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 199.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 199.

⁶² See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problem's of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 128.

⁶³ See Sue Vice, op.cit., p. 200.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 200-201.

In al-Takarlı's novels there is a sophisticated relationship between space, time and character, so that each reinforces or contests the value of the present political or socio-cultural reality. The period of recent history of which al-Takarlı writes was a time of rapid and violent change and narrative structure of his novels show how political or social movements in a certain period affect the life of the individual and how the personal choices of individuals can affect the whole path of their nation in the long term.⁶⁵ Bakhtin's theory of chronotope can help illuminate this narrative structure.

It is also crucial for this study to examine the dialogue between man, time and space from a psychological point of view.⁶⁶ The deep interactions between man, geography and social/political events cannot leave any one of them unaffected by the others, leaving positive or negative psychological traces upon the minds of people as a natural result of their interactions with one another in a specific place and period of time.⁶⁷

Each of the characters in al-Takarlı's novels are simultaneously individuals, products of their time and representatives of a certain societal group or geographical entity. As such, their portrayal in the novels will be analysed on all three levels: psychological, cultural and rational.

The Importance of Geography

Historian George Roux, has written of the Near East as a region where: "the balance between man and nature is more delicately poised,"⁶⁸ meaning that geography and

⁶⁵ See Paul Ricoer, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellaur, (Chicago/London, The University of Chicago, 1983), pp. 101-105.

⁶⁶ For further discussion of psychoanalytic literary criticism, see: Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* (Cambridge/Oxford, Polity Press, 1998), pp. 9-13 and Carl Gustav Jung, *Dreams*, translated by R. F. C. Hull with a new foreword by Kathleen Raine (London/New York, Routledge, 1982), pp. 3-84.

⁶⁷ This idea is taken from: René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore/London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 1-95.

⁶⁸ Georges Roux, op.cit., p. 1.

climate there are neither temperate enough to give humans complete dominion over their environment, nor extreme enough to render their lives a constant fight against the elements, but rather in need for careful negotiation and adaptation. It is arguable that the Near East is not alone in this phenomenon but there is no doubt that the Arabic language exhibits an unusual sensitivity to geographical and climactic change. Furthermore, the relationship between people and the terrain is an enduring one in an enduring theme in Arabic literature. The geography of ancient 'Mesopotamia' (literally 'land between two rivers') - roughly correspondent to modern day Iraq - is responsible for its reputation as the 'cradle of civilisation'. The area has nurtured a plethora of both culture and conflict from the time of the first known civilisation that flourished on its fertile southern planes in the 4th century B. C. - the Sumerian - to 20th and 21st century contest over its mineral resources and strategic position.⁶⁹

Al-Takarlī is concerned with the city as a microcosm of political and cultural life of the country. Baghdad is his main setting but other cities further to the North or South of the country feature whenever he means to illustrate particular cultural aspects.⁷⁰

The geography is important because it ties the people to their history and can be manipulated by the regime to assert its power. As in most countries that have undergone revolution, the distribution of land in Iraq was crucial in fomenting a political consciousness.⁷¹ For example, the social inequalities which arose from British initiatives to co-opt unruly tribes into a central system through the bestowal of land leases and

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 1,66-67.

⁷⁰ "In founding Baghdad, al-Manşūr aimed at securing a basis for his imperial army and a centre for administration. Therefore he searched for a fertile place conveniently situated on the main routes of communications with the various parts of the Empire. The locality of Baghdad was suggested after careful study; it was not far from the ancient capitals, Opis of the Akkadians, Seleucia of the Seleucids and Parthians, and Ctesiphon of the Sasanians. It was situated on the Tigris, in a fertile and thickly cultivated area with many canals piercing the land to serve for irrigation, communications and defence. There were many Christians monasteries and settlements. The land was cheap and flat with no natural or legal restrictions to its expansion." Salih Ahmad al-Ali, "The Foundation of Baghdad," *The Islamic City*, A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern (eds.) (Oxford/Pennsylvania, Bruno Cassirer/University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 92.

powers of jurisdiction contributed to negative concept of law and a class consciousness that gave rise to the Communist and Ba'ath parties.⁷² The systematic reconfiguration of the landscape to consolidate power was a policy actively pursued by Ṣaddām Ḥusayn. He persecuted the Shi'ite in southern Iraq, draining the marshes there to both destroy the traditional life and livelihood of their inhabitants and to remove secure bases for the Shi'ite opposition. Similarly, al-Takarlī describes the rebuilding of the old quarters of Baghdad in *Khātām al-Raml* and *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, emphasising the dual aim of destroying the bases for opposition and the old, potentially reactionary way of life.⁷³ Al-Takarlī's treatment of this destruction and its effects on the minds of the city's inhabitants will be explored in the second and third chapters of this thesis.

Through his description of Baghdad and the way of life there, al-Takarlī highlights the affects of political conflicts on the foundations of the psychological, social and cultural life of ordinary people.⁷⁴ "The city can be seen . . . in terms of a kind of psycho-geography: [as being] the scene of collective emotional life."⁷⁵ Al-Takarlī sheds light on his characters' desires, fears and dreams through his sensitive depiction of the space in which they inhabit. We see that: "[t]he objective space of a house . . . is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with . . . So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous

⁷¹ See Kevin Robins, *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision* (London/New York, Routledge, 1996), pp. 130, 132, 134-137.

⁷² See Matthew Elliot, *op.cit.*, pp. 8-9.

⁷³ I have drawn upon the following for general background on the city in literature: Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (eds.), *Literature and the Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature*, (New Brunswick/New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1981), pp. 133-256; Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: an Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1998), pp. 3-9; Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, translated and edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford/Massachusetts, Blackwell, 2000), pp. 86-93, 100, 103, 111-121, 133-197, 205-208, 219-240; Edward Soja, "History, Geography, Modernity" in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon During (ed.) (London/New York, Routledge, 1999), pp. 135-150; Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" in Simon During (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 151-160.

⁷⁴ "Culture is a set of common understanding, manifest in act and artifact. It is in two places at once: inside somebody's head as understanding and in the external environment as act and artifact. If it is not truly present in both spheres, it is only incomplete culture." Paul Bohannan, *How Culture Works* (New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Tokyo/Singapore, The Free Press, 1995), p. 48.

reaches of distances are converted into meaning for us here.”⁷⁶ Throughout his epic, al-Takarlı shows the way in which each conflict impacted urban life, seriously impairing people’s sense of continuity in both their lives and their identities.⁷⁷

Al-Takarlı shows how familial bonds form the basis of life for an Iraqi person by describing the way in which his characters deal with issues such as religion, sex and other taboos that could expose them to dangerous situations if they err from the rules of their culture, as defined through the bonds of the family.⁷⁸ Moreover, it has always been accepted that the family is valued as the most important social institution in Arab society. The stories of middle class Iraqi families in al-Takarlı’s novels are “not just an interesting historical pursuit or an exploration of popular stereotype, but are vital for developing understanding of contemporary families [in] society.”⁷⁹

In describing the daily routines and dramas of Iraqi families belonging to this most influential and affected class, al-Takarlı is able to convey a deeper sense of the cultural and political changes taking place at a higher level. At the same time, this study touches on some of the major cultural debates in order to appreciate the significance of political

⁷⁵ Kevin Robins, op.cit., pp. 130.

⁷⁶ Edward Said comments on Gasoton Bachelard’s book: *The Poetic of Space: the Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, with a new forward by John R. Stilgoe, translated from French by Maria Jolas (Boston, Boston Press, 1994) in *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, Penguin Books, 1995), pp. 54-55.

⁷⁷ “Identity, . . . offers individuals the security of community and solidarity, of shared patterns of meanings, a bounded world in which one can find others like oneself.” George Schöplin, *Nations, Identity Power: The New Politics of Europe* (London, Hurts & Company, 2002), p. 10. For further discussion of the concept of identity in literature, see: Satya P. Mohanty, “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On Beloved and the postcolonial Condition” in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia (eds.) (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 2000), pp. 29-64 and Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London/New York, Routledge, 1999), pp. 19-28.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the society and taboos, see: The Polity Press, *The Polity Reader in Cultural Theory*, from the introduction of the book (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994), pp. 1-2; Franz Baermann Steiner, *Taboo, Truth, and Religion*, Vol. I, Jeremy Adler and Richard Fardon (eds.) (New York/Oxford, Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 213-214; Stephen Ellingson, “Introduction: Religion and Sexuality in Cross-culture Perspective” and Tola Olu Pearce, “Cultural Production and Reproductive Issues: The Significance of the Charismatic Movement in Nigeria” in *Religion and Sexuality in Cross-cultural Perspective*, Stephen Ellingson and M. Christian Green (eds.) (Routledge, New York/London, 2002), pp. 1-4, 7-8, 10, 13, 21-22, 31-32.

trends and events on the psyches of the people of Baghdad.⁸⁰ The writer achieves this by showing the different ways that the members of an ordinary Baghdadi family tried to behave and adapt their lives,⁸¹ contrasting life before and after the emergence of the Ba'th Party.

The author is concerned with making his readers feel the rhythm of life in Iraq by depicting its cultural facets close up. Al-Takarlı achieves this by concentrating on the geography of Baghdad, because "geography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history 'happens', but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes it in depth."⁸² In his *Atlas of the European Novel (1800-1900)*, Franco Moretti connects political geography with literature and looks at literature's treatment of the environment in response.⁸³ Although confronting the European novel, Moretti's insights can be applied to a writer like al-Takarlı in a new and interesting ways, providing we bear in mind the distinct history of Iraq and the development of the Arabic novel. Indeed, Moretti believes that:

"the nature of a given place . . . is indeed 'a component of the event': in the sense that each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story . . . Space is not 'outside' of narrative, then, but an internal force that shapes it from within. Or in other words: in modern . . . novels, what happens depends a lot on where it happens."⁸⁴

Each of the three novels discusses a particular map of Baghdad, showing us, through its geographical features, how political and social changes in the city affect its culture. They also dwell on closed intimate spaces, such as homes, offices and cafes, where the

⁷⁹ Leonore Davidoff et. al. (eds.), *The Family Story: Blood Contract and Intimacy (1830-1960)*, (London/New York, Longman, 1999), p. 50.

⁸⁰ For further information about the cultural issues and the psychological conditioning of people who belong to the same society, see Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford/Massachusetts, Blackwell, 2000), pp. 32-50.

⁸¹ For further detailed discussion about the way that a family tries to adapt to the ways of life in a certain society, see Leonore Davidoff et. al. (eds.), op.cit., pp. 244-258.

⁸² Franco Moretti, op.cit., p. 3.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 70.

character's private lives are played out. Of theoretical relevance here is Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Bachelard discusses the effect of such intimate places on the psychology of the human being, before and after interaction with the public spaces of the outside world. By applying Bachelard's theory to al-Takarlı's novels, we can elicit "a metaphor of humanness",⁸⁵ whereby the treatment of space reinforces and gives insights into the human/societal condition portrayed. Although Bachelard's is not a literary theorist, his idea that the "setting is more than a scene in works of art . . . it is often the armature around which the work revolves,"⁸⁶ is key to this study's reading of al-Takarlı's trilogy.

In each of the three novels, al-Takarlı focuses on one Iraqi family that belongs to the middle class. The role of this class on Iraq's course was elemental and the effect on this class that that course had, portentous. Iraq's most important social - and at times official - bonds were those of family, so the family structure provides the foundation for drama in the novel. By extension, the family home and each member's relationship to its features is crucial to the plot and to our understanding of character development.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, the first three of which each analyse in turn *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, *Khatam al-Raml* and *al-Masarrāt wal-Awja'*, as well as the above-mentioned theories illuminating structure, technique and effect in the novels. The fourth chapter concludes with a summary of the previous chapters' analysis and some final comments on al-Takarlı's trilogy as an important historical document, as it merges together both exterior and interior parts of our life and may ultimately affect our

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 3-10.

⁸⁵ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. vii.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. x.

perception of ourselves as social and political actors.⁸⁷ The novel is, as Edward Said said, "a concretely historical narrative shaped by the real history of real nations."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ On the novel as a historical document, see Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London, The Merlin Press, 1962), p. 283.

⁸⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Vintage, 1994), p. 92.

Chapter 1

Al-Raj' al-Ba'id

Synopsis of *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*

Although originally written in Paris in 1966 al-Takarlı's first novel, *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, was not published until 1980 at the beginning of the Iraq - Iran war.¹ An amended version, with simplified Iraqi dialogue, was published in 1993. Its historie or fabula,² tells of the unhappy events in the life of an Iraqi family which are caused by: the death of Fuā'd, a friend of the younger son of the family, 'Abd al-Karīm; the rape of their cousin, Munīrah; and the death of their elder son Midḥat. The family consists of: the father, 'Abd al-Razzāq Ismā'il bin Ḥajjī 'Abd al-Razzāq; his wife, Nūriyyah; their daughter, Madiḥa, who is separated from her jobless drunkard of a husband, Ḥusayn and her two daughters Suhā and Sanā'; their elder son, Midḥat; their younger son, 'Abd al-Karīm; the father's sister, Ṣafiyyah; Nūriyyah's mother, Umm Ḥasan; Najjiyyah, Nūriyyah's sister and her daughter, Munīrah.³

The novel is set during the rule of 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim from his seizure of power in 1958 until his execution in 1963. The action in the novel is concentrated between the years 1962-1963. The sjuzet sets the story in two cities in Iraq,⁴ the first is Baghdad and the other is Baqubah, which is further north.⁵ The novel consists of thirteen chapters. The twelfth chapter is the only chapter that has a title and it is divided into two parts, the

¹ Catherine Cobham, *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. vi-vii.

² This is defined in Seymour Chatman's book, *Story and Discourse Narrative: Structure in Fiction and Film*, as "the sum total of events to be related in the narrative, and, conversely the plot" (Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 19.

³ See Nur Elmessiri, "Death on Asphalt", *Al-Ahram* weekly on line, No. 542 (Cairo, 12-18 July 2001), //weekly.ahram.org.eg/2001/542/bo2.htm.

⁴ According to Chatman, the sjuzet is the story which is "actually told by linking the events tied together which are communicated in the course of the work, or what has in effect happened", op.cit., p. 20.

second of which comes after the thirteenth chapter. The title of this chapter is *Al-Zakham wal Baqā'*, which is translated by Cobham as *Brief Shining and Survival*. Because of the splitting device and the title, it seems that the author attributed great importance to this chapter and intended it to make a deep impression on the reader.⁶

Characterisation, "is arguably the most important single component of the novel. Other narrative forms, such as epic, and other media, such as film, can tell a story just as well, but nothing can equal the great tradition of the . . . novel in the richness, variety and psychological depth of its portrayal of human nature."⁷ It has been said that "the 'characters' are deprived of choice and become in a real sense, mere automatic functions of the plot",⁸ but this is not the case with many of the characters in *Al-Raj'al-Ba'id*. In fact, the characters in a novel are sometimes more than an embodiment of real life. Al-Takarli's characters are comparable to those in a Dostoevsky novel. Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky:

"For the purposes of critical thought, Dostoevsky's work has been broken down into a series of disparate, contradictory philosophical stances, each defended by one or another character. Among these also figure, but in far from first place, the philosophical views of the author himself . . . Characters are polemicized with, learned from; attempts are made to develop their views into finished systems. The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision . . . Dostoevsky creates not voiceless slaves . . . but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him. A plurality of independent and

⁵ The city of Baqubah is located to the north-east of Baghdad, and is usually regarded as a northern city, although it is in the central region of Iraq.

⁶ For brief comments on this novel and its techniques, see: Fārūq 'Abd al-Qādir, "Aṣḍā' al-Wāq' al-'Irāqī min al-Khamsīniyyāt lil-Thamāniyyiyyāt-Qirā'h fi A'māl Fu'ād al-Takarli", *Wajhat Naẓar*, No. xvi (Cairo, May 2000), p. 57.

⁷ David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London, Penguin Books, 1992), p. 67.

⁸ Seymour Chatman, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels."⁹

The stream of consciousness technique is used extensively in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* and Bakhtin's idea of polyphony is manifested in the way that different events are narrated several times from different perspectives by the characters, each with a distinct voice. Another characteristic that al-Takarli shares with Dostoevsky is his complex use of allegory:

"the image of an idea is inseparable from the image of a person, the carrier of that idea. It is not the idea in itself that is the 'hero of Dostoevsky's works,' . . . but rather the *person born of that idea*. It again must be emphasised that the hero in Dostoevsky is a man of the idea; this is not a character, not a temperament, not a social or psychological type; such externalized and finalized images of persons cannot of course be combined with the image of a *fully valid* idea."¹⁰

The author leaves the final word to his characters, which means that he constructs the characters discourses around themselves and their world, not around his own.¹¹ This can only happen through the reader's direct access to a character's consciousness, because:

"the 'truth' at which the [character] must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself, can essentially be . . . only *the truth of the* [character's] *own consciousness*. It cannot be neutral toward his self-consciousness. In the mouth of another person, a word or a definition identical in content would take on another meaning and tone, and would no longer be the truth. Only in the form of a confessional self-utterance,

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 5-7.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

¹¹ For further discussion about this point, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 53.

Dostoevsky maintained, could the final word about a person be given, a word truly adequate to him."¹²

That does not mean the narrator in this novel is a covert narrator. In fact, the existence of the narrator is felt strongly from time to time, but as one who is narrating events from the world external to the novel and is not personified.¹³ Since it is generally accepted that:

"as human beings are not generally all-knowing it is conventional for omniscient narrators to be unpersonified, although this convention is not infrequently broken. The term 'omniscient' is often used in a loose way to indicate any work in which the narrative has access to that which - like a character's secret thoughts - is normally concealed from observers in the real world. Thus a so-called omniscient narrator may not, actually, be completely all knowing . . . It should be remembered that, just as novelists may decide to give a narrator more knowledge than is possessed by an ordinary human being, so too they may decide to restrict this knowledge when it suits them."¹⁴

The author's voice can be merged with the narrator's voice, which means that the author's point of view can be expressed beside the ideas presented by the characters in the novel, without exceeding or transcending the characters themselves.¹⁵ Al-Takarlī has chosen to avoid having a completely omniscient narrator in the novel, perhaps because it "is not only unfamiliar to human beings; [but] it may work, [also], against the creation of that tension and uncertainty that exercise the reader's mind in a creative fashion".¹⁶ The beauty of literature is that it portrays "the inner poetry of life . . . the poetry of men in struggle, the poetry of the turbulent, active interaction of men. Without this inner poetry to intensify and maintain its vitality, no real epic is possible and no epic

¹² Ibid., pp. 55-56.

¹³ See Jeremy Hawthorn, *Studying The Novel* (New York/London, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 68.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁵ For further discussion about this idea, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 7.

composition can be elaborated that will rouse and hold people's interest."¹⁷ Al-Takarlı's technique of combining the voices allows different periods of time to be intertwined and meshed together. This is mirrored in the novel's title, which refers to a creative period of time lost to the contemporary citizens of Iraq, a country that had been rich in ancient traditions.¹⁸

The novel's metaphorical title, *Al-Raj' al Ba'id*, translated into English by Catherine Cobham as *The Long Way Back*, depicts the type of attachment that the people in Iraq have with their lost past and unstable present, which affects the future of their lives - (time)- in their country -(place). *The Long Way Back*:

"tells the story of four generations of the same family living in an old house in the Bab al-Shaykh area of Baghdad. Through the exquisite layering of the over-lapping worlds of the characters, their private conflicts and passions are set against the wider drama of events leading up to the overthrow of prime minister Abd al-Karim Qasim and the initial steps to power of the Baath party in Iraq in 1962-63. The skilful building-up of the characters and

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁷ Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, edited and translated by Professor Aurthur Kahn (London, The Merlin Press Ltd, 1978), p. 126.

¹⁸ For further discussion see: Muhsin Jāsim al-Mūsawī, *Al-Riwāyah al-'Arabiyyah*, (Beirut, Dār al-Ādāb, 1988), p. 248. The amended edition was published in 1993 by Dār al-Ādāb in Beirut. The Arabic version of the novel consists of 491 pages, whereas the English translation by Cobham as: *The Long Way Back* consists of 379 pages. Robert Irwin comments on the translated title of the novel by saying: "*Al-Raj' al-Ba'id* can certainly be rendered as *The Long Way Back*, but the Arabic phrase can also be translated as *The Distant Echo*, and on balance, this seems a better title, as it alludes to one of the book's pervasive though skilfully understated themes: the corruption and violence of Iraq under . . . Abd al-Karim Qasim. None of Takarlı's protagonists is particularly political, and that is precisely the point. They are people who can find no hope of salvation in political or social change. They are victims of history, rather than participants in it. Politics is pervasive, but dangerous to talk about. *The Distant Echo* is that of gunfire. Midhat, having thought of killing himself or his wife Munira, after discovering on the wedding night that she is no longer a virgin, eventually decides that they should live after all. However, he is killed almost immediately, the accidental victim of the street fighting that took place in 1963, when Ba'ath Party conspirators launched their coup against Qasim." "The Distant Echo", *Times Literary Supplement*, (London, 3 May, 2002), p. 23. The title of the novel could also be inspired by Qur'ān: "What! When we are dead and have become dust? That is a far (from probable) return", 50:3, *The Qur'ān*, translated by M. H. Shakir (New York, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, 1988), p. 347. This verse refers to the non-believers who are in denial about the afterlife. Al-Takarlı may be referring to the impossibility of Iraq returning to a formal peaceful phase. This title might express the meaning that the author wanted, especially that the novel as Elmessiri says: "is set

their worlds within a brief and clearly determined period of recent history allows for a bold and intelligent portrayal of the ambiguous strengths and weaknesses of Iraqi and wider Arab culture. In addition, the dramatization of the relationships between generations, social groups, and genders is achieved with a mixture of humour, bitter irony, and compassion that identifies it as a great work of Arabic literature.”¹⁹

There is a short paragraph after the last page of the novel where al-Takarlı tells us that nothing in the pages of the book relates to reality, and that “it is better for them and for everyone if they are left in peace and forgotten.”²⁰ But the question that we should ask ourselves here, is this true? “Worrying an entire world into being for over a decade, then publishing, and having it translated, hardly constitutes leaving in peace or forgetting.”²¹ The language in the novel, which is a mixture of classical and colloquial Arabic as spoken in Iraq, is used to project the reality of contemporary daily life onto the novel.²²

This analysis of the novel intends to illuminate the characters’ interaction with place, which is essentially manifested in three features:

- 1- The places with which the characters interact in Baghdad and Baqubah, such as: houses; cafés; orchards; schools; the college; the office in the Ministry; the al-Rāfidayn Bank; the hospital; Uwwānīs bar; the mosque; cinemas; the al-Raṣāfah hotel; Ārām’s shop; the al-‘Ush al-Dhabī restaurant; the Husainiyyah of the Shi’ite; and the waste land.
- 2- The relationship of the characters with the different parts of Baghdad and Baqubah.

against the backdrop of a politically unstable period of Iraqi history, one which saw the execution of one president and the rise to power of a new regime,” op.cit., //weekly. ahram. org. eg/2001/542/bo2. htm.

¹⁹ From Catherine Cobham’s comments on the cover of *The Long Way Back*.

²⁰ Fu’ād al-Takarlı, *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 379.

²¹ Nur Elmessiri, op.cit., //weekly. ahram. org. /2001/542/bo2. htm.

²² For further discussion see: Muḥsin Jāsīm al-Musāwī, *Al-Riwāyah al-‘Arabīyyah*, op.cit., p. 252 and Muḥsin Jassim al-Musawi, *The Post Colonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2003), pp. 133-134.

3- The objects widely used throughout the novel, which define or symbolise aspects of the characters' relationship with space such as: the key to the family's house; the blood; the car; 'Abd al-Karīm's dream about the police officer; the olive tree; the fig tree; the dying dog injured by a car; the rain; Munīrah's suitcase; the pen belonging to the student in 'Abd al-Karīm's college; 'Abd al-Karīm's book and pen; the jinni; the cat; the boiled water; Madiha's cigarette; the kettle; scorpions; the Italian film that Munīrah saw; 'Abd al-Karīm's digging on the terrace of the house; the strained buttons of Munīrah's dress; the mud; the jubjube tree; Midhat's dream of the high-street; his dream of murdering Munīrah; and the river.

These three points will be discussed with reference to Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope.²³ The chronotope is the organising centre for "the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and united. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative."²⁴ In *The Long Way Back*, events can be mapped out geographically, the scene of each is symbolically or metaphorically key to its significance.

"Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins . . . It serves as the primary point from which 'scenes' in a novel unfold, while at the same time other 'binding' events, located far from the chronotope, appear as mere dry information and communicated facts . . . Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel's abstract elements philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on

²³ The theory of the chronotope is fully expanded in M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 84-258.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 250.

flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work. Such is the representational significance of the chronotope."²⁵

The novel will be analysed chapter by chapter to demonstrate the world view of each character, the changing relationship between the characters and their environment and its broader significance in the life of the Iraqi nation.

Analysis of the Novel

The story begins as the grandmother, Nūriyyah, is on her way back to the old family house with her granddaughter Sanā'. The first important event of the novel takes place in the street when Nūriyyah sees her son-in-law, who appears to have just returned from Kuwait. She tries to distract Sanā's attention to prevent her from seeing her father, which also introduces an element of suspense since the reader is bound to want to know the reason for Nūriyyah ignoring her son-in-law:

"The two of them walked slowly, crossing Kilani Street through the long shadows, and began climbing the unpaved alley. Nuriya spoke to her granddaughter. 'Don't walk so fast, Sana dear.'

'All right Bibi.'

It was shortly before sunset and the street was busy behind them, but a slight breeze carried the noise away. They managed to see where they were walking, although the streetlights hadn't come on yet and the faces of the passers - by were indistinct.

'This bread's very hot,' said the little girl.

'May God always bless us with bread.'

'God Willing, Bibi.'

²⁵ Ibid., p. 250.

'Good girl. That's the way to talk. Never let God's name be far from your lips.'

'No, Bibi.'

The bag of fruit and eggs and vegetables was heavy, and Nuriya found it harder to breathe with every step, as the road continued to rise steeply. She slowed down and changed the bag over to her other hand and noticed the little girl staggering under the weight of the bottle of milk and rounds of hot bread.

'Shall we rest for a bit, Bibi?' the little girl asked. 'You're tired.'

'No, dear. It's no distance to the house.'

It was then that she saw him coming round the corner of the next alley, tall, broad-chested, walking unsteadily. She was surprised she could recognize anybody in this forest of shadows, especially someone she had thought was far away.

'Stop, Sana, dear. I want to have a rest.'

'All right, Bibi. I said you were tired.'

He stumbled violently and almost collided with the wall, but recovered his balance at the last minute. She heard him cough and saw his whole body shake. It was for the best if the little girl didn't see him. What freak wind had brought him back from Kuwait? He stopped to light a cigarette. The smoke rose in the air behind him as he walked on, his head up but his gait strangely uneven, as if he'd had a blow to the temple.

'Bibi, this bread's really hot.'

'Yes, dear, I know. Let's go now.'

She watched him walking away and thought he could have been anybody. Who could tell, this monstrosity might outlive them all! It was possible the little girl hadn't noticed him, but he was as stubborn as a mule, moving forward a few steps, only to come to a halt again. She busied herself with her bag of shopping and, trying, to catch her breath, began to speak

to distract Sana. 'Yes, dear. Never let God's name be far from your lips. You can give me the bread if you like. I'll carry it for you.'

'No, Bibi. I'll manage.'

'Good girl. Come on, let's go.'

And off they went again."²⁶

This suspense is caused by a random happening which, "has its origin and comes into its own in just those places where the normal, pragmatic and premeditated course of events is interrupted and provides an opening for sheer chance, which has its own specific logic."²⁷ This kind of chronotope is called the chronotope of encounter.²⁸ "[I]n such a chronotope the temporal element predominates, and it is marked by a higher degree of intensity in emotions and values."²⁹ This kind of chronotope is usually associated with the chronotope of the road, as is the case with this initial event.

"Encounters in a novel usually take place 'on the road'. The road is a particularly good place for random encounters . . . The chronotope of the road is both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement. Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course: 'the course of a life', 'to set out on a new course', 'the course of history' and so on; varied and multi-leveled are the ways in which road is turned into a metaphor, but its fundamental pivot is the flow of time".³⁰

This beginning is a portent of events to come. Here, the road is a metaphor for familiar continuity, represented by the grandmother and granddaughter. Bakhtin says: "the road is always one that passes through *familiar territory*, and not through some

²⁶ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 3-4.

²⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 92.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 243.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 243.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 243-244.

exotic *alien world* . . . it is the *sociohistorical heterogeneity* of one's own country that is revealed and depicted (and for this reason, if one may speak at all about the exotic here, then it can only be the 'social exotic' 'slums', 'dregs', the world of thieves)".³¹ The encounter with Husayn, who had abandoned his family several years ago, threatens to disturb this continuity of the family's life. This is why Nūriyyah feels surprise at seeing him again and Nūriyyah's surprise makes us curious about what had happened between Husayn and his wife's family and creates suspense over what will take place between them in the future.

Nūriyyah and Sanā' reach the family house, which has witnessed the most important events in the life of the family. Bachelard writes of the human being's strong psychological and emotional attachment to the house, which he describes:

"the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams . . . Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world . . . man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. A concrete metaphysics cannot neglect this fact, this simple fact, all the more, since this fact is a value, an important value, to which we return in our daydreaming. Being is already a value. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house."³²

The house, as we will see, is vibrant with the movement of its inhabitants, who are encompassed by events of the novel.

"The action of *The Long Way Back* is focused mainly on [this old] house in the Bab al-Shaykh area of Baghdad . . . Four generations of the same family live in this house which is built around a courtyard open to the sky. Overhanging the yard on the first floor is a gallery, and the rooms of the various members of the family open on to it, as does the large alcove

³¹ Ibid., p. 245.

³² Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

where they gather to eat and drink tea. Bab al-Shaykh is an important part of old Baghdad situated around the famous mosque of Abd al-Qadir al-Kilani (al-Jilani), with its big dome, minarets, and chiming clock. The quarter is bounded by two gates, one opening into Kilani Street and the other into the opposite end of Bab al-Shaykh, near the Kurdish quarter, where some of the events in the novel take place."³³

From what Madiha says to her mother about Husayn's return to Baghdad in the kitchen of the house we learn of an important political event in the history of Iraq and Kuwait, which has had reverberations from that era until the present day. This event emphasises the idea of the house being a part of what is taking place in its area of the city and in the whole of the country:

"Madiha sat down on the vacant chair . . . 'Mum, is it true you saw Husayn when you were out?' asked Madiha, . . .

So the child had noticed after all. 'Did Sana tell you?' she asked. 'I thought I'd stopped her seeing him. He seemed drunk. He's nothing to do with us any more.'

'I know.' Madiha let out a long sigh.

. . .

'I knew he wasn't going to stay in Kuwait long', Madiha went on. 'Since Abd al-Karim Qasim said Kuwait belongs to us, things have got worse for Iraqis over there'."³⁴

We also learn in this house, some of what was happening at that time in the country, such as the relationship between 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim and the famous singer Mā'idha Nuzhat, from the comments of Aunt Ṣafiyyah - as she watches the singer on the

³³ Catherine Cobham, "Translator's Note", *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. v.

³⁴ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 6.

television.³⁵ The television becomes a medium connecting the reader to the prevalent historical situation through the conversation it inspires between the characters.

Each room in this ancient house symbolises the deep interaction between the life of each individual in the house and the outside world of Iraq and through such interaction, depicts all aspects of life in Iraq, because "in normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life."³⁶ "It is, though, back in the inward and enclosing space of the single room and its domestic content that the outward unfolding (so appropriately called 'the flowering') of civilisation originates."³⁷

Whenever the events of the novel start to become immersed in day to day life our attention is drawn back by reference to some important event that has already occurred, yet still contains elements of suspense.³⁸ Apart from the return of Ḥusayn, the death of Fu'ād, the best friend of the younger son 'Abd al-Karīm is mentioned, but not fully explained in the first chapter and what makes it effective is its horrific impact on 'Abd al-Karīm.³⁹

The reader is plunged into the world of the novel by the two kernel events of Ḥusayn's return and Fu'ād's death and many of the subsequent events and actions follow from them. Neither of these two kernel events, which occur in the first chapter of the novel are explained. This kind of technique is referred to in literary criticism as prolepsis.⁴⁰ The author uses this device to keep the reader immersed in the written text, by preserving the elements of suspense.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 38-39.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁸ For further information see Muḥsin Jāsim al-Mūsawī, *Al-Riwāyah al-'Arabīyyah*, op.cit., pp. 252-255.

³⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 16-18.

⁴⁰ For further discussion, see: Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, translated by Jane E. Lewin foreword by Jonathan Culler (Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 67-79 and Seymour Chatman, op.cit., p. 64.

The second chapter begins with the arrival of Munīrah and her mother at the family house and 'Abd al-Karīm's illness caused by the death of his friend, the matter of which we learn of through his inner-monologue. In fact, the whole of this chapter is narrated through 'Abd al-Karīm's stream of consciousness.

He mentions that he had not been able to enter his college examination, because of his illness and especially because he did not get the right care: "[i]f illness is taken to be a natural, physiological occurrence, then it's open to being understood and treated . . . But if it's psychological, or a response to some obsession, then it's very doubtful if it can be treated at all."⁴¹ This provokes us to question the nature of 'Abd al-Karīm's illness. He focuses on Munīrah in his thoughts and feels her anxiety, comparing it to Fu'ād's pain: "I stared at her, drawn in by the aura of pain surrounding her. She was trapped in it, like me and Fu'ād on that awful day, and I could feel Fu'ād, almost see him all around us, binding us together . . . and there was the same unfathomable look in his eyes as there was in hers now."⁴²

To 'Abd al-Karīm, his illness becomes both a connection between himself and Fu'ād and between Munīrah and the two of them: "I lived my illness conscientiously because I couldn't think of any alternative, and it was what brought us close to each other. Illness united us. Mine and hers . . . from the waves of despair in her voice I realized she was talking about herself as well."⁴³

We begin to understand 'Abd al-Karīm's complex and overlapping feelings towards the death of Fu'ād, his illness and Munīrah,⁴⁴ when he starts to recall the story of his friend by means of analepsis and his dream about the police officer who showed him Fu'ād's photograph:

⁴¹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24,29.

"The police officer took two or three steps forward and came to a halt a short distance from the chair where I was sitting, bound hand and foot. He stood like a peacock, his eyes blazing. Sometimes he was a Gestapo officer, sometimes an interrogator from the Spanish Inquisition. He began to address me, fixing me in the eye: 'I have to inform you that it is my duty to arrest you on charges of murder, desertion, and treason.'

Then he gave a Nazi salute that frightened me more than what he had just said. My limbs were numb and stiff, and the sweat was pouring off me. I wasn't really tied to the chair, but I might as well have been.

'You'd do well to understand,' he began again, 'that my duty as an honest official and a citizen obliges me to arrest all those accused of murder, desertion, and treason. What do you think we're in this world for?'

Another strange salute. Then for the third time: 'Don't allow yourself to think about anything but your arrest for murder, desertion, and treason.'

He wore a little round badge on his chest, which he insisted on pointing out to me when he finished speaking. This time there was no salute. The image on the badge zoomed towards me, and I saw it in close-up. It was only then I began shouting. The picture was a jumble of lines, like ant-tracks in the dust, but from it a clear image emerged: Fuad's face in the last few moments of his life."⁴⁵

The technique of analepsis is used at this point to explain and interpret some of the events and actions in the novel.⁴⁶ 'Abd al-Karīm, Fu'ād and the woman Fu'ād loved are the young generation in Iraq, at that time. Al-Takarlī's characters are providing a discourse about themselves and their immediate environment, but also a discourse about the world; they are not only cognisant, but ideological too.⁴⁷ This young generation

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁶ For further discussion, see Gérard Genette, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-67 and Seymour Chatman, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ For further discussion, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

represent the future of the country but are destroyed mentally and physically because of effaced traditions and the new conventions that were spreading all over the country.⁴⁸

This point can be understood from 'Abd al-Karīm's recollection of Fu'ād's love affair. His dream about the police officer and Fu'ād's photograph is indicative of another idea,⁴⁹ which the author hints at when the president's love affair with a famous singer was mentioned. Al-Takarli was interested in conveying the social climate of the country at the time, as well as the merciless political climate, which was its cause. The young people of the country suffered from both, which is signified by Fu'ād's accidental death in the street. The car ran into him symbolising the unstable and insecure life in Iraq, while the brothel where Fu'ād's beloved lived, emphasises the decay in Iraq during that period, especially amongst of its youth. One comes also to an understanding of the reason for 'Abd al-Karīm's mention of his mother and her love for him. Nūriyyah, here, is a symbol of Iraq in a period that was overburdened with negative social and political situations: "[t]hese reflections were interrupted by the sounds of someone coming down from the roof. The lightness of the tread made me think it must be my mother. She always walked softly like that, as if she was scared of hurting the feelings of the ground beneath her feet. Was she an infinite source of love?"⁵⁰

A character would not merit such a description unless she represented an abstract idea, as Nūriyyah represents a whole period of suffering in the contemporary history of Iraq. 'Abd al-Karīm cannot obtain the emotional support that he needs from his mother and this causes him to remain ill.⁵¹

The obsession that consumes 'Abd al-Karīm is his feeling of guilt over the misunderstanding that had arisen between him-self and Fu'ād over Fu'ād's feelings for

⁴⁸ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

the prostitute. The dream about the police officer could also be an indication of this.⁵² 'Abd al-Karīm's exhortations to Fu'ād to consummate his relationship with the prostitute made Fu'ād take a step against his convictions, which happened to be the step that caused his death.⁵³ This situation sums up the alienation from which this generation had been suffering and which would lead to degradation and suffering for generations to come. The sense of foreboding is apparent when 'Abd al-Karīm says: "[w]ith him sitting beside me and the sky overcast and the smell of the river on the cool autumn breeze, I sensed a whiff of tragedy in the air."⁵⁴ The river can be understood as a symbol of the course of time recording such historical events in the country.

Everything that 'Abd al-Karīm suffers causes him to lose interest in life, lose faith in everything and feel only apathy towards what surrounds him.⁵⁵ Despite the bright appearance of nature, 'Abd al-Karīm could only see its dull side. Even the olive tree, which is blessed in Islam,⁵⁶ is described by him as being barren,⁵⁷ which could indicate the loss of his religious faith as well as a loss of hope for the future. The description of the olive tree here is in clear contrast to its positive image in the Qur'ān and in other religious texts, as well as in the ancient myths which suggest that Iraq was the birth place of human civilisation.⁵⁸

Even his way of describing Munīrah is strange, because he imbues her with the same lofty qualities as he does with his mother:

⁵² Ibid., p. 22.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 28-29.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 21,23-24.

⁵⁶ *Al-Qur'ān* 95:1. For a detailed discussion of the significance of the olive tree in Islam, see al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, revised by Ḥamid Ḥafnī Dāwūd, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut, Dār al-Balāgha, 1998), p. 597.

⁵⁷ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 24.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the eastern mythology of the beginning of humanity, see: S.H.Hooke, op.cit., pp.30-32,46-49; Georges Roux, op.cit., pp. 1-16,66-120; Eleazar M. Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth*, translated by Guy Lanoue and Alexandre Sadetsky (New York/London, Routledge 1998), pp. 3-25,156-163,177-200.

"The moment the figure emerged through the door at the bottom of the stairs leading to the roof, I saw it was her, treading slowly, light as a bird, then stopping to lean against the balustrade. . . The moments that followed were magical for me, immeasurably beautiful. I was surprised and enthralled to see her in such a way and at such a time. She wasn't Munira, my cousin, but an explosion of light in my confused life. She was my sorrow, my painful past, my love, my longing, my sickness and misery. She stood there without moving and looked unearthly, ethereal."⁵⁹

Bakhtin's polyphonic theory suggests that the: "hero is not only a discourse about himself and his immediate environment, but also a discourse about the world; he is not only cognizant, but an ideologist as well."⁶⁰ Deducing from 'Abd al-Karīm's description of her, Munīrah's character represent Iraq in its contemporary phase. She is a discourse of the struggle to maintain pride against aggressive forces of change. 'Abd al-Karīm is an idealist and his failure to grasp reality manifests itself in his sickness. He is a discourse of weakness seeking a source of strength, embodied first in his mother, then in Munīrah.

The chain of events leading to Fu'ād's death and 'Abd al-Karīm's mental breakdown began when the young men opted to live their lives outside the secure boundaries of their homes, in places like Café Balqīs and the brothel where Fu'ād's beloved had ended up. The old family house is a world in itself and possesses "powers of protection against the forces that besiege it."⁶¹ Both men had been sheltered by their homes until they decided to experience the social life resulting from the corrupt political environment of Baghdad. Suddenly, dangers encircled them. The large city was incompatible with their untainted way of life and they were unable to integrate with it. Fu'ād's death and 'Abd al-Karīm's illness can be seen as symptomatic of this corruption and a portent of the

⁵⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 25.

⁶⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 78.

⁶¹ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 37.

malaise that would infect the rest of their once secure worlds. The instability of Baghdad during that period made it impossible for a family such as 'Abd al-Razzāq's to live their lives without interference, especially once a member had entered the life of the city outside. 'Abd al-Karīm's loss of the key to the house and his stumbling on the stairs, signal the beginning of the family's catastrophe with an air of absurdity that was affecting the ordinary citizens of Baghdad.⁶² Fu'ād's suffering in what was left to him of life in the hospital merely an addendum to the previous idea.⁶³ Even the hospital represents the corruption that was taking over the city as it is implied that the real reason for Fu'ād's death was his maltreatment under its care.⁶⁴

'Abd al-Karīm's depression prevents him from grasping the true reason behind the visit of 'Adnān - the son of Munīrah's elder sister - to his Aunt Munīrah. In fact, the strain of trying to understand what was behind 'Adnān's visit drives him to mix with the rest of the family again, by entering the kitchen and sitting with his mother and grandmother in one of the corners. This makes him feel as if his limbs were shaking and the heat in the stuffy room makes his head throb. The world and all its mysteries makes him sick and he does not have the strength to carry on fighting it. His stomach is churning, and a cold sweat breaks out on his forehead. He buries his head in his hands and closes his eyes, a hollow reed shaken by nausea.⁶⁵ 'Abd al-Karīm's suffering these symptoms in the corner of the kitchen is significant, since the nooks and crannies of a house or a room are spaces in which we normally like to withdraw into ourselves, they are a kind of symbol of solitude for the imagination, as if it is the spirit of the room or house.⁶⁶ This cramped space of introspection emphasises 'Abd al-Karīm's isolation and

⁶² *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 16-18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶⁴ This inversion of the value of the hospital as a social good is indicative of a corrupt system, just as Elaine Scarry examines the state's inverse use of medicine as torture, op.cit., pp. 42.

⁶⁵ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 33.

⁶⁶ For further discussion see Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 136.

inner darkness. Even when he is physically close to members of his family, he is shut off from them mentally.

The large door of the house opens to the outside world as Piere Albert Birot says:

"At the door of the house who will come knocking?

An open door, we enter

A closed door, a den

The world pulse beats beyond my door."⁶⁷

That world is calling for 'Abd al-Karīm to change, but he is still unable to respond to such a call. The passageway, which 'Abd al-Karīm crosses from the kitchen to the door of the house where his friend's father is standing, gives us the feeling that 'Abd al-Karīm is trying to come back into being. The passageway can be seen as the passage through which he can be reborn by confronting all the issues of life beyond the door.⁶⁸ He tries to reach the end of the passage but fails, just as he tries to involve himself with the real world by confronting what was taking place in the country and fails.⁶⁹ 'Abd al-Karīm is incomplete and his strained relationship with space and inability to adapt to the times means that his discourse of negativity demands: "the re-creation of a spatially and temporally adequate world able to provide a new chronotope for a new, whole and harmonious man, and for new forms of human communication."⁷⁰

By the end of the second chapter we have learnt what happened between 'Abd al-Karīm and his friend, so that element of suspense has been terminated, but this does not

⁶⁷ Quoted from *Les Amusements Naturels*, p. 217, Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 3.

⁶⁸ For further discussion about the development of a character, see: Muḥsin Jāsim al-Mūsawī, *Al-Riwāyah al-'Arabiyyah*, op.cit., pp. 255-256; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 101-178; M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 167-206, 246-247.

⁶⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 35.

⁷⁰ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 168.



mean that suspense has vanished from the novel, as it begins again with someone else, Munīrah and her mother, who have suddenly appeared in the house.

The first scene in the third chapter begins by drawing attention to the narrator's description of the fig tree.⁷¹ The fig tree is like the olive tree, one of the blessed trees in Islam and is a symbol of religious faith and identity, but it is described in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* in a negative way.⁷² Its spiritual value is inverted and the tree becomes symbolic of the rotten situation in the country. This interpretation is emphasised by the sequence of events in the novel. The focus of this chapter is Aunt Şafiyyah's thoughts about the sudden appearance of Munīrah and her mother in their lives.⁷³ Şafiyyah also notices Munīrah's interest in 'Abd al-Karīm.⁷⁴

So through the external implied narrator and Şafiyyah's stream of consciousness, we acquire new information about Munīrah in addition to what we had already learned from 'Abd al-Karīm's stream of consciousness in the previous chapter. Although the author concentrates on the characters' opinions of each other as revealed by the thoughts that run through their minds, he does not make us feel that the information which we get in this way is the final truth. "The truth about a man in the mouths of others, not directed to him dialogically and therefore a *second-hand* truth, becomes a lie degrading and deadening him . . . Truth is unjust when it concerns the depth of *someone else's* personality."⁷⁵ Rather, we learn more about Şafiyyah through her thoughts about Munīrah.

The small personal details and seemingly trivial interest in those around them are the building blocks of a greater structure in al-Takarlī's novels. Each character becomes a window through which to view a limited part of this structure.

⁷¹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 37.

⁷² Q 95:1. For further discussion see al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, op.cit., p. 597.

⁷³ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 38-40, 42.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

"[D]iscourse about the world merges with confessional discourse about oneself. The truth of the world . . . is inseparable from the truth of the personality. The categories of self-consciousness that were already determining the life of the [characters'] acceptance or non-acceptance, rebellion or reconciliation now become the basic categories for thinking about the world. Thus the loftiest principles of a worldview are the same principles that govern the most concrete personal experiences . . . This merging of the [characters] discourse about [themselves] with their ideological discourse about the world greatly increases the direct signifying power of a self-utterance, strengthens its internal resistance to all sorts of external finalization."⁷⁶

Through observing the daily activities of Şafiyyah and Umm Hasan and hearing Şafiyyah's observations, we reach a critical understanding of what type of character they are. They both represent the ordinary people of Iraq, who, despite what is going on in their lives, would like to live quietly and simply. This idea is emphasised by their actions and their way of life, showing "that the image of an idea is inseparable from the image of a person, the carrier of that idea,"⁷⁷ as it has been mentioned before. A character interests al-Takarlı "as a *particular point of view on the world and on oneself*, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality."⁷⁸

What draws Şafiyyah's attention to Munīrah is her refusal to meet 'Adnān when he comes to the house. Munīrah is infuriated with her mother and Şafiyyah.⁷⁹ This is another kernel event that generates suspense concerning Munīrah's life, not only for the readers of the novel, but also for the other inhabitants of the house. The old house has become for her the "real being of a pure humanity, which defends [her] without ever

⁷⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 59-60.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 78-79.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁷⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 43-49.

being responsible for an attack."⁸⁰ The chapter ends by raising our suspicions that Munīrah is hiding something about her past in Baqubah from the others.

After noticing this, Aunt Şafiyyah observes Munīrah's behaviour more closely and especially the developing relationship between Munīrah and 'Abd al-Karīm. She notices the young girl's agitation whenever she meets 'Abd al-Karīm and her concern for him. Şafiyyah cannot determine anything about 'Abd al-Karīm's feelings towards his beautiful young cousin; in fact it seems to her that he has completely lost interest in life because of his illness.⁸¹

In the last section of this chapter the author depicts the political and social events that were happening at the time and their effect on the cultural life of Iraq. The conversation between the members of the family, as they gather in the alcove for late afternoon tea, gives us some idea of what is happening in the country.⁸² They discuss the threadbare traditions, which have caused some people to waste or even to lose their lives, such as the story of the two brothers whose family did not want them to marry before their older sister; the story of the man who killed his aged aunt just because she worked as a servant in a brothel; and the inexplicable reasons for the sudden acquisition of wealth by 'Adnān's father. Such conditions were undermining the essence of Iraqi culture, represented by the lives of the people of Baghdad and in this scene, all problems are attributed to one source: the disintegration of political order under 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim's rule. Perhaps this is what the conversation between Midḥat and his father expresses, as well as a vague premonition of the fall of the president and doubt as to whether a successor might bring improvement. Ḥusayn's problems with his wife and 'Adnān's visit to his aunt are mentioned in the course of this particular conversation, as a hint from the external narrator, who is trying to portray the contemporary historical

⁸⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

⁸¹ *The Long Way Back*, *op.cit.*, pp. 49-52.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 52-60.

period, of which people like Ḥusayn and 'Adnān are products. This conversation gives us a feeling that the alcove in this house is a microcosm of the arena of life external to it in Baghdad where dissatisfaction with the current regime was opening up a dangerous vacuum of power also.⁸³

During this conversation, we learn from Aunt Ṣafiyyah's observations that Miḍḥat is interested in Munīrah and Miḍḥat's interest encourages Aunt Ṣafiyyah to drop hints to her brother:

" 'Don't you have any plans to get Miḍḥat married off?' she whispered to her brother.

'Why do you ask? Have you heard something?'

'Should I have?'

'What then?'

'I was just saying . . .'

Voices calling from below interrupted her, then the light went on in the small gallery and Munira appeared, accompanied by the two little girls. As they ran laughing past the alcove, Munira glanced briefly at Abd al-Karim. Her eyes were bright, and her hair flowed over her shoulders. Abu Miḍḥat cleared his throat a couple of times, then rose to his feet. 'God bless you. You start to say something, then stop in the middle! I'm going to wash my hands'.

She was glad he talked to her like this. She wanted to wash her hands too, but was afraid she'd miss seeing the food arrive. There was noise rising continuously from the yard, and the lights were on all over the house. Umm Hasan came into view at the far end of the small gallery and began her slow progress towards the alcove, holding on to the wooden

⁸³ For further discussion of the relationship that develops between the house and its dwellers in connection to a certain area or city, see Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-73.

balustrade. Şafiya watched her as she made her way unsteadily along, then realized that

Umm Hasan's appearance on the scene meant dinner would be there any minute."⁸⁴

So this chapter ends with an event that increases the element of suspense, leaving us with the question of what could happen within this emotional triangle between Midhat, Munirah and 'Abd al-Karim. Midhat's admiration for Munirah is the novel's main subject since the plot of the novel revolves around it from this point on.

The fourth chapter is also a polyphony of voices moving between the external, implied narrator and the thoughts of a character heard through his stream of consciousness and his inner-monologue. It is also interspersed with flashback. The chapter begins one morning as Husayn wakes up in his aunt's house. The chapter describes Husayn's inner-self; it gives us a brief description of his personality and character and the pointlessness of his life.⁸⁵ He used to be an employee of the al-Rafidayn Bank, acquainted with intellectuals who were interested in politics and literature and concerned about the situation in the country. He had been a happily married man with two bright daughters.⁸⁶ Suddenly he became a bohemian, who left his job and deserted his family because of a single debauched day that he spent with some of his friends, gambling and fornicating.⁸⁷ The chapter also describes the extent to which he had neglected himself - the uncleanness of his body, his inability to confront the outside world represented by his inability to wake up or to open his eyes in the bright daylight. Husayn's refusal to cope with contemporary events or live up to his responsibilities is manifest in his loss of memory, which, we-gather, he chooses as a protective measure.⁸⁸ The question that confronts us here is why a sensitive, educated and an aware personality like Husayn should choose such a destiny for himself. Is it the

⁸⁴ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 60-61.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64, 72-73, 76.

unstable political and social life that had started to produce a strange and disreputable social class like the one to which 'Adnān,⁸⁹ Arzūqī and Nu'mān Sallūm belonged,⁹⁰ which had made Ḥusayn lose hope in a better future in Iraq? Or is it an innate weakness in his character? Ḥusayn's character represents the idea of a lost and erratic generation that has rejected the lifestyle of that period and therefore abandoned life in its entirety. Ḥusayn's vomiting is a symbolic attempt of the need to rid himself of his feelings of disgust towards the corrosion of life in Baghdad. The city can no longer offer comfort to him as it had done in the past.⁹¹ Conditions in the city and the whole of the country at that time, made people like Ḥusayn feel humiliated and hastened their moral and spiritual corruption.⁹²

This is the reason for Ḥusayn's excessive debauchery, demonstrated by his various love affairs. Each affair also serves to illustrate, on a micro-level, the prejudice and alienation people were facing due to political and economic deterioration. Ḥusayn's Kurdish lover and the woman he met in a shop in Kuwait refers to the fate of the minority races.⁹³

Ḥusayn's wife, Madiḥa is a symbol of Iraq in one of the difficult phases of its contemporary history, when it could not find the support that it needed from the people represented by Ḥusayn.⁹⁴ Her rejection of him makes him feel that his life with her is empty, barren and shabby. We see these feelings projected onto the room where he had spent the night after a major quarrel:

"You sat up in bed at daybreak once, ages ago, trembling with fear. You had no need to wake up at such a time. You'd only gone to sleep around two in the morning after pointless

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 55-56,63,75-76.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 67,69,77.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 64-66. For further examination of the relationship between literary personae and their geographical location, see Franco Moretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-73.

⁹² *The Long Way Back*, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 65,67,87-88,94-96.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

fighting, bitter words, rebuffs and abuse from Madiha, and you were tired and dejected . . .

The room was almost bare. She'd driven you out of her room, and you were on your own like a counterfeit monk, when fear crept up on you. The fear of death, the fear that you were finished, that nothing was any use any more. Everything you did, anybody did, was futile. You shook, your sweat ran cold as you sat in bed alone, a traitor to yourself and your world. A sense of desolation welled up from all four corners of the room and encircled you, and from that day onwards you began to go gradually downhill."⁹⁵

Here, the house resembles their disintegrating married life, which no longer contains any refinements of intimacy. In fact, it resembles the frightening features of the city outside.⁹⁶ We see the city was turning into a large complex that is not understood by its own inhabitants. It is as if Baghdad is seeking someone to take the responsibility for confronting the devastating events that are taking place there, but no such support came from its own people. A parallel can be drawn here with the relationship between Madiha and Husayn. This idea persuades us that Madiha is a symbol of Baghdad or even the whole of the country in one of the difficult phases of its contemporary history. He relishes his current kind of life, but whenever he is unexpectedly confronted with his inner-self, he is shocked by his dreadful behaviour and afraid of where that path is leading him. That is what the author implies through the mirror, which represents the inner-self of Husayn: "[h]e had caught sight of his reflection in a big mirror: pale unshaved, sallow and lost-looking, and had been shocked at the sudden appearance of this spectre in front of him."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁹⁶ For a thorough analysis of the house as a mirror for exterior events, see Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

⁹⁷ *The Long Way Back*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

Although he had chosen his current state, he does not stop longing for his old life with his family and his meetings with Midḥat, who is full of vitality making him aware of what he is missing.⁹⁸

Even the places where Ḥusayn passes his time resemble the kind of mental and moral abyss he lived in, as they show the poorer and darker side of life in Baghdad.⁹⁹ We see some of the other people who go there because of their reduced circumstances, such as the homosexual, Abū Shākir, who represents the aberrance of life at that time through his homosexuality and the former police officer, Abū Nāẓim, who represents the corrupt consequences of government negligence.¹⁰⁰ Ḥusayn lives in the Kurdish quarter, which is located on the far side of Bāb al-Shaykh.¹⁰¹ We can imagine its ugliness when he says: "[t]he alleyway is as muddy and twisted as the lives of its inhabitants. And you bob up and down as you walk along."¹⁰² The same thing could be said about the Uwwānīs Bar or the Café Yās, which is located in Bāb al-Sharqī near the Dār al-Salām cinema.¹⁰³

In this chapter, new facts emerge through the conversations between Ḥusayn and Midḥat, or through the thoughts and the observations that pass through Ḥusayn's mind. The first one is the familial relationship between Ḥusayn and 'Adnān.¹⁰⁴ This forces us to question the emergence of a young man such as 'Adnān, who treats all around him with contempt, from the ordinary, decent people of the country (he is also related to Munīrah, and Midḥat).¹⁰⁵ Al-Takarlī emphasises 'Adnān's originates from the borders of the northern region of Iraq. He is from Houider in the Diyala region,¹⁰⁶ which might be

⁹⁸ Ibid, pp. 68-69,72,81,92-93.

⁹⁹ For more analysis of character development as portrayed through interaction with cityscape in literature, see Franco Moretti, op.cit., pp. 101-103.

¹⁰⁰ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 93-95.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 63,76,96-99.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 76. Houider is in the Diyala region and is near Baqubah. It is in the central part of Iraq, near to the boundaries of the northern region.

indicative of the Ba'th challenge to 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim, which emerged from that area.¹⁰⁷ When Munīrah runs away from Baqubah,¹⁰⁸ she is also running away from, the kind of north that 'Adnān refers to in his conversation in Uwwānīs Bar.¹⁰⁹ Munīrah's aversion to both 'Adnān and his region is an allegorical references to the threat posed by the Ba'th Party to all that was good in Iraq.

The second event is that Ḥusayn notices Midḥat's admiration for Munīrah and the third is that Ḥusayn registers 'Adnān's agitation in front of Midḥat,¹¹⁰ which provokes our curiosity about the reason for his unease. We should consider the information given in this chapter that Munīrah is a secondary school teacher unlike Madīḥa, who is a primary school teacher.¹¹¹ This might be a hint from al-Takarlī that Munīrah symbolises Iraq in a new political phase that is more advanced in some way. Each piece of information is connected with the other and they are left unresolved for the time being. However, the mystery of Nūriyyah's dismay at seeing her son-in-law at the beginning is now resolved.

The fifth chapter of the novel is about Midḥat. It is narrated through the external omniscient narrator and through Midḥat's inner-monologue. There is also a flashback through Midḥat's mind to what happened at the beginning of the novel i.e. Fu'ād's death and the arrival of Munīrah and her mother at the family house. This chapter has much in common with the first and third chapters because the narrator's voice is much clearer than the voice of the characters, whereas in the second and fourth chapters it penetrates their thoughts only at intervals. It is by now becoming apparent, in accordance with Bakhtin's polyphonic theory that every character in the novel represents an idea or a concept relevant to that time. What a character represents is shown by their beliefs and

¹⁰⁷ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 96-97.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 32-33, 44-48, 54-56, 72.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 96-97, 98-99.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 72-73, 81-82, 91-92.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

by the attitudes that he or she adopts towards themselves, towards other characters, and towards the reality in which they live. These beliefs and attitudes also restrict their actions. For example, we learn about Midḥat's personality and the idea that he represents from descriptions such as the following:

"He washed his hands and face to remove the dirt and dust of the street. And what of the dust of the images and memories implanted in his heart? The suffering in the streets. . . But he mustn't mix unconnected subjects. His personal life was based on non-negotiable principles: honest self-esteem, controlled egoism. And therefore no agitation before a meal or during it, and preferably, not after it either . . . Food for all. Beware of other things. Books and the like. Close the bookshops, gentleman, and let's open more restaurants! . . . Good. Peace. Justice. God. All mere words. It's pointless trying to define them. In real life they don't have any serious meaning. Who am I, or more accurately what am I? What's the real world? What's the soul? What's knowledge? What's thought? Insoluble problems and unanswerable questions, because any attempt to put them in the context of real life is doomed to failure."¹¹²

From the description of Midḥat's character, we come to the conclusion that his complex mentality is a rather materialistic one. This is because of the decadence that had permeated all levels of Iraqi society at that time and which made people feel that their lives were worthless. The idea of instability, isolation, and impotence is symbolised by the old dog dying in the street, only able to express the anguish in its eyes after having been accidentally hit by a car.¹¹³ This image re-evokes Fu'ād's death and Ḥusayn's feeling that he too will die some day suddenly in the street. Therefore, Midḥat becomes convinced that his own egotism is the only viable course. The solitary star in the sky that he meditates on here at this point emphasises his belief that he must remain detached from the world in order to achieve his own aims:

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 105-106.

"The cold caught him on the back of the neck, and he rubbed the spot a few times. If you kept looking hard at the sky, a few little stars appeared shining brightly. Distant and solitary, they did not exist unless you could see them. What linked them - he in the belly of the darkness on the west side of the courtyard in their house in Bab al-Shaykh, and this little trembling star on the outer edge of the universe - was solitude, isolation, detachment from the world. This was the nearest to the truth you could get; it was not alienation or separation. It was to be at the center of the world, with nobody behind or in front of you, nothing preceding or succeeding you, to have your own laws which nobody but you could apply. I have nothing to do with the beggars and the unemployed who sell their principles, and sometimes even buy them, for a morsel of bread. The world begins and ends with me; I have to take my own spatial and temporal limits as my starting point."¹¹⁴

In this chapter Midḥat's feelings towards the family house gives us an intimate insight into how he feels about life in Baghdad, since the life of human beings inside a house is a continuation of their lives outside it, "[o]utside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains."¹¹⁵ The nooks and crannies in the stairways, the attic, the cellar, the roof, the courtyard, the passageway, the doors, the windows, the walls and the rooms all symbolise the attachment of the people of Baghdad, in spite of everything, to life in the city. But the house and most of its inhabitants also symbolise the attempt to deny what lurks below the surface of life and to preserve a sense of security and continuity through the simple routine of daily life. Awareness of this denial makes Midḥat want to pull himself away from his own environmental roots by avoiding his family.¹¹⁶ Here we see how space and its symbolic nature can both lend itself to a state of mind and influence the course of human behaviour like his dream about the high-street. His

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 104-107.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹⁵ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 211.

¹¹⁶ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 106-108.

sentiments towards his own house reveal that he suffers the same sense of loss, worthlessness and alienation that the people of Iraq feel in their own country.¹¹⁷ This makes him turn in on himself, yearning to escape the corrupt society. The internal space that once represented safety and security slowly becomes infused with the madness and oppression of the external world, just as formally stable moral minds like Ḥusayn's and 'Abd al-Karīm's become disturbed and depressed.

The author also places emphasis on the idea that Midḥat has lost his faith. We learn this from his feelings about his father praying, about God and the negative reference to the olive tree.¹¹⁸ Midḥat's alienation was the reason for his fury at Ḥusayn for returning from Kuwait to Iraq because Midḥat felt that the only way to have a better life was to leave the country.¹¹⁹ Similarly, he refuses to live on the margins of life, clinging to frail connections which bind him to what is going on, as represented by his grandmother and his aunt who sit glued to the television.¹²⁰ This effort confirms his mental rebellion against the complete disintegration of Iraqi society in that era.

The house that shelters Midḥat is also the embodiment of home and dreams for him. Bachelard describes the house as both grounding its inhabitants to earthly reality and providing sanctuary which to transcend it. The reality and the dream formed a whole, because "[t]he house, the cellar, the deep earth, achieve totality through depth. The house [is] a natural being whose fate is bound to that of mountains and of the waters that plough the land."¹²¹ Such a house stretches from the earth to the sky, "rising from the most earthly, watery depths, to the abode of a soul that believes in heaven."¹²² This kind of house not only gives the man inside it peace and shelter that makes him able to resist the hostility of the city, but it also clings to its inhabitant, by becoming "the cell of a

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

¹¹⁸ Q 95:1. For further discussion see al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, op.cit., p. 597.

¹¹⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 109.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

¹²¹ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., pp. 23-25.

body with its walls close together."¹²³ So despite his resistance to the way of life there, Midhat feels a strange intimate connection to the house. It is more than an inert box - it is an inhabited space, which transcends geometrical space and becomes an extension of his own state of mind.¹²⁴ This is expressed by the following paragraphs:

"He looked at the high wall of their house, built of small stones and clay, almost indistinguishable from the darkness, despite the stars in the sky. This was his worn out, uneasy, cheap world with its narrow-minded traditions and idiotic morality. A world of secret pleasure and acceptable crime. A world where everything was permitted behind closed doors. A world of cowards. His mother came out. He saw her looking towards his room, then turning to the place where he was standing. A world of blind, lachrymose sentiments. She went into his aunt's room. Individualism precluded anger and irritation. If you were a healthy egoist you didn't get psychological illnesses. You could make judgements with steady nerves and a clear mind, without hatred or resentment, even condemning people to death and destroying their world.

The yard was dark and the sky above it very black, shining with stars. The wooden pillars in the big gallery, which supported the roof, looked spindly and on the point of collapse. Would he ever be able to leave these ruins behind? They were kneaded with his blood. Ruins of stone and humanity. A series of muffled knocks could be heard at the outer door. But they could become a deadly prison if he decided to stay there all his life. Added to which, this sort of attachment to places and people, as well as being intellectually unacceptable represented an embarrassing obstacle on the path to being alone in the vast, rich world outside."¹²⁵

This shows Midhat trying to prove to himself that he is not attached to the house and expressing his desire to cut his psychological bond with it. Behind this desire is his

¹²² Ibid, p. 25.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹²⁴ For further discussion see Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 47.

discontent towards his mother who in his mind represents the stagnant phase that the country has been going through for some time. His desire to break out from the oppressiveness of the house and escape the bonds of family structure is a manifestation of the widespread discontent among his generation for whom the times offered little alternatives.

The security of the house and its inhabitants is starting to disintegrate. We see that the painful upheavals that the suburbs and the outskirts of the city were suffering from, begin to penetrate into the city's core. The continuous pain throughout the history of the country is represented in Midḥat's inner monologue, when we hear him describing his family as "[t]he unholy family experiencing the delirium of shared emotion. They had inherited celebrations of grief, festivals of lamentation. Down the ages, these had been the distinguishing features of their continuing trivial and sterile existence."¹²⁶ Like Midḥat, al-Takarlī seems to be impatient with the concept of life as a continuity of passive acceptance and does not choose to write about such things. He believes that people should rise up out of their lethargy, live in the present, and deal with events by trying to comprehend them and face up to them. As Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky:

"He makes almost no use of relatively uninterrupted historical or biographical time, that is, strictly epic time; he 'leaps over' it, he concentrates action at *points of crisis*, at turning points and *catastrophes*, when the inner significance of a moment is equal to a 'billion years', that is, when the moment loses its temporal restrictiveness. In essence he leaps over space as well, and concentrates action in two 'points' only: on the *threshold* (in doorways, entrance ways, on staircases, in corridors, and so forth), where the crisis and the turning point occur, or on the *public square*, whose substitute is usually the drawing room (the hall, the dining room), where the catastrophe, the scandal take place. Precisely this is his artistic

¹²⁵ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 111-112.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

conception of time and space. He often leaps over elementary empirical norms of verisimilitude and superficial rational logic as well."¹²⁷

One of the early kernel events in the novel, the arrival of 'Abd al-Karīm to the house on the night of Fu'ād's death, occurs at the threshold of the house and introduces several elements of surprise. It is particularly ominous since this part of the house represents the connection between its inhabitants and the movement of life outside it, Bakhtin describes the chronotope of the threshold as:

"highly charged with emotion and value, the chronotope of *threshold* ; it can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life. The word 'threshold' itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold). In literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly . . . those of the staircase, the front hall and corridor, as well as the chronotopes of the street and square that extend those spaces into the open air - are the main places of action . . . , places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man. In this chronotope time is essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time. . . these moments of decision become part of the great all-embracing chronotope of mystery - and carnival - time."¹²⁸

So action at the threshold of the house promises to affect their routine lives. It is also the point of vulnerability, at which the safe internal sphere can be violated by external intrusion.

¹²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 149-150.

¹²⁸ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 248-249.

Midḥat's conviction in his opportunistic, materialistic philosophy is confirmed by his conversation with Ḥusayn in the ministry office. It is surprising that although Ḥusayn has chosen a life outside norms and social bonds, he rejects Midḥat's materialistic egotism. While listening to Midḥat talking, Ḥusayn experiences feelings of joy because of the pleasant weather and the brief showers, which differentiates him from Midḥat and hints at his optimism for renewal from the fertile earth.¹²⁹ However, it is also clear from this conversation that Midḥat's egotism possesses elements of an ethical concern for the interests of others and that the reason for his egotism is his rejection of the corrupt society in which he lives. This could be seen as being an indication of the hidden good side of his character. During this conversation Midḥat realises that the reason for Ḥusayn's adoption of a hedonistic life-style is precisely the same reason that makes him believe in egotism. They are different sides of the same coin and their antagonism towards one another and failure to reconcile differences signifies the crisis facing intellectuals in Iraq at that time.

The period when Midḥat, Ḥusayn and 'Abd al-Karīm began to involve themselves in Baghdad life differs from the time when Abū Midḥat was a young man; in fact, it is almost the opposite as if there is two historical maps of the city - the first one belongs to Abū Midḥat's generation and the second to Midḥat's generation.¹³⁰ This is apparent from the story that Abū Midḥat tells Midḥat about his own father, Midḥat's grandfather, which conveys a sense of stability and security both in Baghdad and in the country as a whole. Abū Midḥat tells of his search for his father at sunset without any harm coming to him, despite his youth. He refers to the presence of the grandfather in one of the city's orchards in springtime, the handsomeness of the grandfather reflecting the great beauty of the city in that era.¹³¹ The beautiful singer, who was in the company of the

¹²⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 114-117.

¹³⁰ For an examination of conflicting zones and interpretations of the city in literature, see Franco Moretti, op.cit., pp. 18-24.

¹³¹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 118-120.

grandfather, affirms the same idea as well as indicating the gaiety of life in Baghdad. This is also clear from the tone in which the father depicts the events in the story - as if he is speaking of the immemorial past. Midḥat likes the story, as if it were a fairy story that shows what is missing from real life. The story also shows why Abū Midḥat exudes calmness, being a more content person than his two sons and his son-in law because he is a product of such a beautiful, peaceful period in the history of Iraq. This is also reflected in the certainty and faith of his generation in contrast to the lack of faith shown by the generation of these unstable times.

The recounting of Abū Midḥat's story to his elder son is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of Munīrah and her mother. This is another important event that takes place at the threshold of the house, as if this were an indication of the importance of this new event erupting from outside the boundary of the house into the interior world of its inhabitants.¹³² Munīrah longing to settle in Baghdad and her obvious exhaustion imply that something happened in Baqubah that had affected her deeply and made her wish to return to the city that she loved and that had protected her in the past. However, the ominous information she gives about the political circumstances in Baqubah generates further suspense and the feeling that the north might be as damaging for Baghdad - the centre of the country - as it has been for her. The burden of Munīrah's unhappiness is emphasised by the heaviness of her and her mother's suitcase and the fact it is put down in a dark corner of the house.¹³³ The suitcase and its heaviness are signifiers of the instability of Munīrah's life as she is shunted between the two cities of Baghdad and Baqubah. Bachelard's theory might lead us to conclude that an unknown destiny awaits her from the dark corner where her suitcase was left.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., pp. 120-121.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 122.

¹³⁴ For a discussion of the significance of corners in a house, see Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 136-147.

Through his narration, Midḥat is trying to subdue his feelings for Munīrah because of his rejection of all social attachments, but as time passes, this suppression causes him to become not only sexually but also emotionally attracted to her.¹³⁵ This might also be because the affection that he has noticed between her and ‘Abd al-Karīm makes him jealous.¹³⁶ We only come to recognise Munīrah’s allegorical significance as the homeland and its hope for a better future through the attraction of both brothers to her. Munīrah’s concern for ‘Abd al-Karīm could represent Iraq’s interest in strengthening the younger generation, which could help overcome her malady. Thus the idea Munīrah represents begins to take shape and offer potential means to others. Bakhtin describes this as dialogic nature of the ‘idea’:

“[C]reating an image of the idea in Dostoevsky is his profound understanding of the dialogic nature of human thought, the dialogic nature of the idea. Dostoevsky knew how to reveal, to see, to show the true realm of the life of an idea. The idea *lives* not in one person’s *isolated* individual consciousness - if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else’s voice, that is in someone else’s consciousness expressed in discourse. At that point of contact between voice - consciousness the idea is born and lives.”¹³⁷

This dialogical relationship is of particular importance in al-Takarlī’s novels, which focuses on flawed or incomplete characters who need the qualities replete in others. Imbalance and disunity beset their efforts to succeed, just as they beset Iraqi society and politics. Midḥat’s generation has to change before a healthy relationship between Iraq

¹³⁵ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 123-125,131-132,139-141.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 122,125-128,130-132.

¹³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 87-88.

and its people can flourish again. This can be seen in the transformation in Midḥat's feelings towards Munīrah from totally physical feelings to affectionate emotion, which is symbolised by his walk through the dark passage, helping to carry her suitcase.¹³⁸ We could envisage the passageway as a rebirth for Midḥat, as he emerges from the womb of self-absorption, in which he has been locked up. But the passage could also represent the painful duration of unrequited love that he will suffer. The sudden challenge to his own materialistic philosophies that his own feeling towards his cousin present, is reflected in everything around him becoming dim and faded. His stumbling on the stairs represents a crisis in Midḥat's world-view. He attempts to cast aside his feelings of confusion and revulsion towards his country in order to reach out for the love that is embodied in the character of Munīrah.¹³⁹

Midḥat's attachment to Munīrah makes him concerned about his brother and he tries to help him by drawing him out of his grief.¹⁴⁰ During a conversation between the two brothers, we begin to notice the difference in their personalities. 'Abd al-Karīm lacks personal ambition and for that reason quickly became involved in public life, such as the death of Fu'ād and the strike at his college. Midḥat has a materialistic nature and believes in the idea of every man for himself. Midḥat cannot offer or understand the kind of help his brother is in need of. 'Abd al-Karīm's approach to the future is captured in the image of him gazing at some distant spot through the window of his room and by his feeling that he could not bear to watch the death of someone close to him again.¹⁴¹ This understanding of the personalities of both brothers explains why Munīrah initially cares more for 'Abd al-Karīm than for Midḥat, whose presence has no initial impact on her. Munīrah, as a symbol of Iraq during a new phase of its contemporary history,

¹³⁸ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 122.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 131-134.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 125-130.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 129.

exemplifies the positive qualities of nationhood, as a force that unites people for a common cause and helps them to envision a morality beyond themselves.

The threads of the plot are drawn together in Munīrah's official transfer back to Baghdad. The significance of this event is indicated by the indirect way in which Midḥat hears about it. He is told by his Aunt Ṣafiyyah that 'Adnān came to inform Munīrah of her transfer and that there was a confrontation between them, which Ṣafiyyah was informed of by Sanā'.¹⁴² This confrontation also occurs at the threshold of the house and is an important indication of life in Baghdad at that time where competing political forces were trying to control the population. This can be understood in terms of the chronotope: strong emotions and conflicts erupting in specific places with significant symbolic value.

Midḥat feels uneasy over what he has been told, especially since he feels that 'Adnān's behaviour towards his aunt Munīrah was disrespectful and suspect.¹⁴³ This event increases our feelings of surprise and generates even more suspense concerning the reason for Munīrah's arrival, but increases the probability of our earlier assumptions that Munīrah was running away from something in Baqubah. It also increases the feelings of insecurity in the inhabitants of the house following Munīrah's unexpected arrival and 'Abd al-Karīm's breakdown. We can gauge this in the effects it has on Aunt Ṣafiyyah and Sanā'. That night, after Midḥat has been informed of 'Adnān's unsuccessful attempt to see Munīrah, he reconsiders his life now that Munīrah has entered it. His world-view begins to open out, as represented by the image of the terrace and the brightness of the sky.¹⁴⁴ This fact is equivalent to what Bakhtin's comment that "the issue here is not merely that the action of the novel is not yet concentrated in the spaces of rooms where private family life goes on but rather unfolds under the open sky,

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 133-137.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 138-139.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 138-141.

in movement around the earth."¹⁴⁵ Midḥat is starting to become a part of the world of Baghdad by offering his lifeblood to it, as symbolised by the water that he offers to Munīrah.¹⁴⁶

The sixth chapter of the novel is narrated by the omniscient narrator, whose voice is freely interspersed with Sanā's thoughts. The chapter begins with Sanā' breaking a plate in the kitchen while she is washing it, which causes her mother to hit her, curse her and punish her by excluding her from sleeping with the rest of the family that night. She is banished to the cellar of the house.¹⁴⁷ As Bachelard says in his musings on the psychological relationships between different places in the house and its inhabitants, that sleeping in the cellar can symbolise our harmony with the irrationality of the depths when we dream, especially since the cellar is "first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces."¹⁴⁸ According to Bachelard, the cellar can also be a symbol of the security provided by the mother's womb - especially given that it is the place in the house nearest to the earth.

The question that occupies our minds here is: why does the author designate a whole chapter for Sanā'? From the way that the events are interpreted through the little girl, it seems al-Takarlī is trying to convey a complex idea through her character. This character who first informs her mother about the return of her father from Kuwait and who also reveals to Aunt Ṣafiyyah what has happened between Munīrah and 'Adnān, has a connective function that moves the plot forward. But Sanā' is also a portent of the neglected generation to come. Sanā's monologue with her doll before she goes to sleep makes us aware of the lack of love and care that she suffers due to her parents' separation and the consequent treatment that she and Suhā receive from their mother.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 167.

¹⁴⁶ *The Long way Back*, op.cit., pp. 139-141.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 143-145.

¹⁴⁸ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 144-145.

If Madiha, represents Iraq in one of the corrupt stages of its contemporary history, her behaviour towards her daughters is suggestive of this negative effect that the period will have on Iraq's future. The idea of Sanā' as the vulnerable nascent generation growing up in an increasingly hostile world is reinforced by the fear she feels when she looks up at the dark wooden roof of the room,¹⁵⁰ since the roof of a house ought to provide its inhabitants with a sense of safety by sheltering them from the elements. The proceeding section - a flashback, narrated to us by the exterior implied narrator but largely from Sanā's point of view - confirms the idea of her insecurity. This technique is used for dramatic effect. This section begins while Sanā' is standing near the olive tree and the still water in the courtyard of the house.¹⁵¹ These features could be interpreted as an attempt by Sanā' to penetrate the wider life (the courtyard) despite its stagnancy (the still water) but without forgetting her faith and identity (the olive tree).

Sanā' is also the intermediary for the afore-mentioned threshold scene when she hears knocking and opens the door to a man who tells her to call Munīrah.¹⁵² She feels uncomfortable with him, but goes to call Munīrah. Munīrah is "heading for the stairs with a spring in her step. The sparrows are hopping about on the branches of the olive tree as darkness descends."¹⁵³ The darkness into which she is descending pre-empt the dark memories she will face at the door. Munīrah takes Sanā's hand and walks along with her to the doorway. This indicates the union and sympathy between the two characters who have both suffered from a loss of love through events beyond their control, representing two different historical phases of the country. The chronotope of threshold is here in its most fundamental instance as the chronotope of crisis and the break in time is as if the event falls out of the normal course of biographical time:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 147.

"Moments of adventuristic time occur at those points when the normal course of events, the normal, intended or purposeful sequence of life's events is interrupted. These points provide an opening for the intrusion of nonhuman forces - fate, gods, villains - and it is precisely these forces, and not the heroes, who in adventure-time take all the initiative. Of course the heroes themselves act in adventure-time - they escape, defend themselves, engage in battle, save themselves - but they act, as it were, as merely physical persons, and the initiative does not belong to them . . . In this time, persons are forever having things happen *to* them . . .; a purely adventuristic person is a person of chance. He enters adventuristic time as a person to whom something happens. But the initiative in this time does not belong to human beings."¹⁵⁴

Munīrah discovers that the visitor is 'Adnān,¹⁵⁵ and we feel her sense of shock. Munīrah slams the door in his face with a noise like an explosion and leans against it with Sanā', as if she were resisting and rejecting the period in her past that 'Adnān represents. Sanā' and Munīrah share the feeling of fear that makes them squeeze into a corner of the wall behind the door of the house, unconsciously seeking a safe haven from the danger that the outside world may thrust into their lives.¹⁵⁶ After they both go upstairs, Sanā' overhears Munīrah saying to Najjiyyah: "we're not going to Baqubah any more."¹⁵⁷ Our curiosity about the obscure relationship between Munīrah and 'Adnān and the aversion she has towards Baqubah, intensifies, binding us to the story.

The next day Sanā' accompanies Munīrah to see the school where she will be working after her transfer to Baghdad. While they are on their way they coincidentally encounter Midḥat in the road,¹⁵⁸ just as Nūriyyah and Sanā' met Ḥusayn in the road at the beginning of the novel. The road is a metaphorical place whose borders are loaded

¹⁵⁴ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 95.

¹⁵⁵ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 148.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 148-150.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 151-153.

with chance occurrence that might befall on the travellers. It is also a prevailing feature of the novel as a physical manifestation of the course of history, replete with traces of former eras and loaded with irrational forces that provide random interruptions in the natural course of events. As such, it can also be a new point of departure and the place of denouement, as it happens in the case of Munīrah and Midḥat. The road is an important place for meetings between people who are separated socially but whose different fates are combined for better or worse.¹⁵⁹ This is exactly what happens in Munīrah and Midḥat's case as Sanā' observes. The road starts to delineate the course that their relationship will take afterwards. This kind of development cannot take place between them in the confines of the house, which represents the social inviolability of the family.¹⁶⁰

The seventh chapter in the novel is again narrated through 'Abd al-Karīm's stream of consciousness, sometimes as flashbacks. It begins after his return from college, where he has just finished an examination in which he did not do well.¹⁶¹ This chapter charts the progression of 'Abd al-Karīm's feelings of despair. His lack of any goal in life leads to an anxiety, which fuels his desire for death. The vicious circle created by 'Abd al-Karīm's listlessness and anxiety is highlighted by the half-hour that he wastes on such thoughts at the beginning of the exam. These thoughts do not leave him until one of the students in the classroom drops a pen, which helps 'Abd al-Karīm regain his concentration. The whole scene conveys the tenuous, shifting relationship between 'Abd al-Karīm and reality, where his attendance and truancy are equally likely. This is reinforced by the contrast between the dimness of his thoughts and the brightness of the light in his room, which makes the reader feel the extent to which 'Abd al-Karīm is cut off from his environment. At a later point, there is the correlation between the gloom of

¹⁵⁹ This aspect of the road in literature is discussed in both: M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 91-95, 243-249 and Franco Moretti, op.cit., pp. 47-57.

¹⁶⁰ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 150-153.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

his thoughts and the gloom of his room and the night outside.¹⁶² If 'Abd al-Karīm personifies the loss of hope in the lives of the intellectuals of Baghdad, we see that their apathy can only lead to self-destruction. This idea is emphasised when 'Abd al-Karīm starts to have thoughts of death as someone listening to his own death rattle after living a life full of fear. For example, he imagines the extinction of the whole human species while he is at the college and the extent of the depression that overcomes him is conveyed by his loss of any sense of place or time while he is having such thoughts.¹⁶³ The college represents the path to the future for the new generations of any country, so 'Abd al-Karīm's disorientation and despair in this place suggests that the oppressive state of affairs in society and politics has become stronger than the positive power of education.¹⁶⁴

Space is again used to reinforce the idea that there is no future for the young generation when 'Abd al-Karīm describes the emptiness of the café at sunset as if he were standing in an endless cemetery. The whole of the city is like a cemetery to people like him because there is no future for them there. This idea is confirmed when he is confronted with the appearance of wealth in the form of a girl driving a large white car, a sudden encounter whose dynamic brightness contrasts with the idea of his black passivity. The whole of his description of the centre of Baghdad where the university and the college are located - the emptiness of the buildings, the paleness of the janitor's face, the off-putting complexity of the exam timetable, the emptiness of the café near the bridge, the sunset and the girl who drove the car - highlights the difficulty and emptiness that greeted young Iraqis at that time. This is why the whole city appears as a cemetery with 'Abd al-Karīm standing at its centre. While we are privy to 'Abd al-Karīm's thoughts, we always hear him expressing his pre-occupation with waiting - waiting for

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 155-158.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 157-158.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 159.

something to happen and change things so that afterwards he would be able to resume a normal life; something major that has to happen in the city to reform all its different aspects.¹⁶⁵ The fact that 'Abd al Karīm is waiting for some miracle of change to take place in the city without actually taking part in it reinforces our idea of a negative passivity amongst the young that are merely acquiescing in their society's degradation. 'Abd al-Karīm easily surrenders to corruption, which identifies his weakness at this stage.

'Abd al-Karīm's passivity in response to his environment and its negative consequences infer a parallel with the apathy of intellectuals who allowed the political and the cultural decay to overcome them. 'Abd al-Karīm is different from Midḥat in character because he tries to understand life in Baghdad, both politically and socially wanting to change it, however this had resulted in the death of his best friend. In the beginning Midḥat does not care to change anything; all he cares about is reaping for himself the best the city has to offer. However, in the end, the result of both men's experiences of life in the city are the same. Both withdraw into their shells and try to isolate themselves from the community, just as Ḥusayn did before them. 'Abd al-Karīm and Ḥusayn also resemble each other in waiting for change to take over the city. Munīrah cannot understand any of these things when 'Abd al-Karīm tells her about the thoughts that trouble him and prevent him from living his usual life.¹⁶⁶ He tries to explain the under-development of the people of the country, especially those belonging to the ethnic minorities, as represented by the character of the ugly Armenian shoe shiner.¹⁶⁷ He loves her in spite of her failure to understand.¹⁶⁸ In her presence, 'Abd al-Karīm completely forgets about death. He wants to spend his life with Munīrah because,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 156-159,165.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 159-165.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 160-161.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 160-161. For a further discussion of the relationship between a person and the city that he lives in. See Walīd Khālīs, *Al-Madinah fī Qiṣṣaṣ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad: Dirāsah fī Al-Bī'ah Al-*

through her, he feels the sanctity of the land of Iraq that people like Fu'ād had died for.¹⁶⁹

'Abd al-Karīm describes the morning after his exam as being very bright and beautiful; the house is very quiet,¹⁷⁰ and the olive tree was "bathed in the sun's golden rays."¹⁷¹ His mother insists on bringing his coffee to where he is sitting in the alcove and there she tells him that last night Sanā' had heard her uncle Midḥat proposing to Munīrah while the three of them were at the cinema.¹⁷² So the bright beautiful morning, the still olive tree bathed in the sun's rays and the quietness of the house, are all in stark contrast to the hidden floods of emotion and loss that were about to surge up within 'Abd al-Karīm and boil over - presaged by the voices that were "like the murmur of water simmering on the stove."¹⁷³ The alcove here is where an important personal event takes place: the private conversation between 'Abd al-Karīm and his mother, which leads to great changes in the lives of Munīrah, his brother, and himself. It is one of the most important places in the house and the interaction that occurs here can change the course of events. It is where secret, intimate actions, and dialogues take place. This leads to the interruption of the ordinary sequence of time.

Once again, Sanā' is the intermediary and precipitator of action. This is established by what her grandmother says about her: "[m]y dear, she's little but she's a devil. She hears every single thing that goes on in this house."¹⁷⁴

'Abd al-Karīm once again begins retreating from life by withdrawing from the environment and the reality to which he belongs. This is symbolised at the end of the chapter, when he finally closes the book that he had brought into the alcove, signifying

Makaniyyah, a research paper given at the second conference on the short story and the novel in U.A.E, (1988), pp. 162-163.

¹⁶⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 162-164.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

his surrender of hope for his personal happiness. Feeling that he has lost Munīrah, 'Abd al-Karīm is cast back into a circle of indecision and impotence, which is demonstrated by his wanting to write a name in the book but then changing his mind.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps he had meant to write Munīrah's name, but he can no longer be sure that she belongs to him - just as young Iraqis were feeling that the Iraq of their dream was being stolen from them.

The eighth chapter is about Madiḥa and is narrated by the external omniscient narrator. It begins when Sanā' wakes her mother early in the morning because of noises she hears coming from the kitchen. The narrator depicts Madiḥa's exhaustion when she is awakened by her daughter's calls by saying: "Sanā's voice came from a bottomless cave."¹⁷⁶ The distance between Madiḥa and her daughter can be said to represent the gap of cultural understanding that would arise in Iraq. Sanā's efforts to wake her mother may refer to the increasing difficulty of the next generation to rouse their country from its political inertia and cultural stagnation. This chapter contains two key events: the first is Madiḥa's conversation with Munīrah about Midḥat and the second is Munīrah's hesitation towards Midḥat's proposal of marriage.

The narrator describes Madiḥa's fear of leaving her room because she is afraid of the darkness in the courtyard of the house.¹⁷⁷ Madiḥa's fear can be explained according to Bachelard's theory of the psychological attachment between the human being and his immediate environment, beginning with his home and its various parts, extending to his outer universe. The threshold of Madiḥa's room at this moment, described by the narrator as being the source of her fear, acquires a metaphorical meaning because the whole situation is connected with a possible moment of discovery that might change the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 169-170.

character's life. This makes her cling to her room,¹⁷⁸ which represents to her the protective centre of the house in which she can hide her past and a potentially tainted future represented by the dark courtyard.¹⁷⁹ So Madiha, who represents Iraq in a stagnant phase, is trying to confront the obscure events, symbolised by the idea of the jinni that were taking place on the surface of her life map, but she is lacking in strength and is exhausted, particularly because there is no one to support her. This situation does not make Madiha/Iraq forget the identity that she had possessed throughout her history: her beauty and her faith, which are all symbolised by the blue sky, the light of dawn and the olive tree, but it has become more difficult for her to draw strength from it.¹⁸⁰ Madiha visibly relaxes when she sees her Aunt Safiyyah, who suggests to her the need for support from her own people even if the only thing they do is prattle. The prattle of her Aunt Safiyyah about the jinni symbolises the traditional culture and way of life of the ordinary and simple people in Iraq throughout its history.¹⁸¹ This soothes Madiha, reminding her of simpler times.

The jinni turns out to be merely the white cat that wanders around the house.¹⁸² However, this situation makes Madiha realise that when she is confronted with any kind of obscure threat, there is neither a firm ideology to reassure her nor any strong being to support her. She has only the elderly, like Safiyyah, who are only half-aware of what is happening or the very young, who are not yet fully formed in their physique or intellect, like Sanā'.

We can also consider Madiha's reaction to the cat situation as a social reaction indicating her status as being a separated wife and a single parent in an Arab country like Iraq. Madiha no longer feels that she belongs to her family's house as she did before

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 170-172.

¹⁷⁹ For further information about the house being a protective entity to a person, see Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., pp. 39, 105-135.

¹⁸⁰ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 169-170.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 170-172.

her marriage, which is why she is always rushing to serve all the members of her family in order to make herself feel that she deserves a place amongst them. Ordinary things like the cat, appear strange and frightening to her and emphasise her lack of control. Again we are facing a traditional issue.¹⁸³ Madiha misses the presence of her husband, who would have conferred upon her the status of a married woman. Her reaction to this loss of this status makes her conceal the appearance of femininity and shrink into herself, as her world had shrunk when she became separated from her husband. These social and cultural constraints make her unconsciously choose to wear black clothes. This sentence indicates her need for Husayn: "[w]here had that wretched cat gone?"¹⁸⁴

All these feelings are bubbling in Madiha's soul just as the water boils in the tea kettle, coupled with a taste of bitterness registered in the smoke of her cigarette.¹⁸⁵ We perceive Madiha's change of status in her feelings towards the house, which are very different from what they once were. The boiling kettle and the cigarette that she smokes dynamically express this change. The kettle and the cigarette are not simply static things or even things contained in a static place. Al-Takarli frequently uses descriptions of inanimate objects to chart a development of a character. The contrast between past and present feelings towards a certain space - the family house - turns the house into a dynamic space, reflecting and affecting the emotions of its inhabitants. "Those things that are static in space cannot be statically described, but must rather be incorporated into the temporal sequence of represented events and into the story's own representational field."¹⁸⁶

Madiha's bitterness and withdrawal into the shadows of the house are directly linked to society's treatment of women. The voice of the external omniscient narrator merges,

¹⁸² Ibid, pp. 171-174.

¹⁸³ For further information about the complex issues of culture, see Terry Eagleton, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-50.

¹⁸⁴ *The Long Way Back*, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 174-175.

¹⁸⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, *op.cit.*, p. 251.

here, with the technique of flashback, when Madiḥa remembers how she came to marry Ḥusayn. Her family pressed her to agree, simply because of the belief that a girl of her age should be married as soon as possible. The narrator goes on to describe, through her stream of memories, how she was initiated into sex by her husband and the fluctuation of her feelings between pain, shame and joy:

"She had bled in the train to Basra; the color of the blood on the white sheets had particularly alarmed her. She didn't know how she'd survived when the fool had sex with her a second time before they arrived, and she bled even more violently. She hadn't been fully aware of what was being done to her - she was twenty-two years old and had never seen a man's genitals even in her dreams. So she believed that everything had happened properly and according to the rules, despite the pain and terror and revulsion and embarrassment."¹⁸⁷

The sexual relationship between Madiḥa and Ḥusayn portrays the more negative aspects of culture in Iraq, which make it difficult for its people, who are imbued with negative cultural traditions, to reform Iraq itself. This point has been elaborated by Wiebke Walther in her discussion of Fu'ād al-Takarlī's work that shows "how a leading Iraqi author has evolved from simply criticizing social attitudes to sexuality, especially women's sexuality, to using the portrayal of relations between the sexes as a means of expressing rejection of paralysing traditions and political injustice."¹⁸⁸

While Madiḥa is in the kitchen, Munīrah appears in her white night-dress wearing a blue robe that is wide open at the neck, exposing part of her right breast.¹⁸⁹ The author compares the two women in terms of the colours that they are wearing and the way their bodies behave in those clothes to further emphasise the traditional idea in all Arab

¹⁸⁷ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 174-175.

¹⁸⁸ Hilary Kilpatrick, "Introduction" in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, R. Allen et al (eds.) (London, Saqi, 1995), p. 13.

¹⁸⁹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 175.

societies that divorced or separated women are caged up, neither possessing the status of being married nor the freedom of the unmarried.

The confrontation between the two women over Midḥat's proposal to Munīrah also takes place here. Madiḥa is shocked by Munīrah's sadness, because she does not know the real reason behind it. Madiḥa also notices that Munīrah keeps looking at the olive tree throughout their conversation.¹⁹⁰ It is as if there is some kind of flood threatening to sweep Munīrah away from all she holds dear, perhaps from sanity itself. In fixing her gaze on the olive tree she is trying desperately to buttress her roots, to plant herself in reality and draw faith from its symbolic sanctity.

The next scene begins with Madiḥa standing in front of the lighted stove in the kitchen after the family have had their lunch, where talking with her mother about Ḥusayn's illness, which has made her think of visiting him.¹⁹¹ The stove indicates the confusion of her feelings. Even the gloomy weather indicates how she feels about her husband's illness. The voice of the external omniscient narrator and the technique of flashback again merge in evoking her memories about their married life.¹⁹²

The incompatibility of the environment and Madiḥa's emotions of hopeful anticipation, underscores the perversity of a society where even a sick, abusive husband offers her only chance of a proper dignified life. The small gallery passage that she has to go through to reach her brother, Midḥat and her daughters, tangibly embodies the time where secrets and passions will be revealed.¹⁹³

Madiḥa's entrance into her husband's alienated life makes a transitional point in her life in which she is forced to question the validity of pinning her value to such a man and

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 177-178.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 178-180.

¹⁹³ A discussion of how time is materialised through the description of space is given in: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 149-150; M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 243-250; Muḥsin Jaṣim al-Mūsawī, *Al-Riwāyah al-'Arabīyyah*, op.cit., pp. 255-256.

to make a decision based on her own judgement. For the first time, she is introduced to the ugliness of life in the area on the other side of Bāb-al Shaykh behind the Yās Café.¹⁹⁴ This represents the repulsive side of Baghdad or perhaps the true face of the city revealed.¹⁹⁵ She has to go through three metaphorical spaces that symbolise the significance and the difficulty of the decision that she will have to make. These spaces are: the threshold of the doorway of her husband's aunt's house, the narrow stairs that lead to his room and the threshold of the doorway of his room.¹⁹⁶ There she discovers that her husband's life has become as dark and filthy as the quarter that he lives in and that he is falling apart like the rest of this forgotten poor dirty quarter, as his aunt describes it.¹⁹⁷ When Madiḥa asks him about his future plans, especially concerning his daughters, she cannot get a clear answer. He seems to her to have abandoned all responsibility.¹⁹⁸ In fact, when she asks him the question, he looks "distractedly into a corner of the room,"¹⁹⁹ as if he needed to hide himself in a closed space away from the world that he has rejected. We can draw a parallel here between Ḥusayn's physical sickness and 'Abd al-Karīm's mental illness, which also causes him to seek out dark corners. Madiḥa understands that he does not intend to resume his life with her and therefore decides to return to her father's house, "luckily it wasn't far . . . leaving Ḥusayn in his grave."²⁰⁰ After what she discovers, she accepts that her husband is not her rescuer but a relic of the past, with all its negative customs. Using the metaphor of the grave for Ḥusayn's abode, defines the new limit of Madiḥa's acceptance of her society's value system. She chooses life without a husband over the status of service to a decomposing one.

¹⁹⁴ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 178.

¹⁹⁵ For an analysis of the portrayal of ugliness and poverty in the city, see: Walīd Khālīs, op.cit., pp. 163-66 and Franco Moretti, op.cit., pp. 105-110, 115-123.

¹⁹⁶ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 181, 183-184.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-187.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-191.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

The narration in the ninth chapter switches between the external omniscient narrator - mostly in the past tense - and Munīrah's inner-monologue - mostly in the present tense, in addition to the flashback technique that often merges with the narrator's voice. Munīrah is still an obscure personality because everything that is known about her has come either from observing her actions or from the point of view of others. In this chapter, we learn of Munīrah's feelings about 'Adnān's visit, when he brought her transfer papers to Baghdad. The same scene is re-iterated through Munīrah's awareness of space and time. In these distinct moments, her intuition and fear, about who could have brought the transfer papers, appear to us as she makes her way to the door down the staircase and along the long passage.²⁰¹ It is as if Munīrah's feelings are projected onto the spaces that she is walking through in order to prepare her for what will be revealed of her past life at the threshold of the house. When she slams the door in 'Adnān's face, the whole structure of the house supports her in not letting him enter, in spite of his vigorous kicks on the door.²⁰² It is as if the house is protecting and defending her against the enemy outside, because she had come to Baghdad seeking refuge within its walls.²⁰³ The house's protective character mirrors Baghdad's relationship with Munīrah. The transfer papers that 'Adnān throws in her face offer her refuge and it seems as if the entire city is trying to enclose her, once more, to its bosom away from the pain of alienation, which contains the terror of the past as embodied by 'Adnān.²⁰⁴

'Adnān is not only the elder son of Munīrah's sister but had been Munīrah's friend too. The teenage 'Adnān had a rebellious, violent and ambiguous personality.²⁰⁵ Yet she had felt that her relationship with him had developed into a strong friendship. In springtime she asked him to take her to his father's orchards on a bright sunny Friday, but there he raped her under a blossoming orange tree:

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 196.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 196-197.

²⁰³ For a detailed discussion of the house as a protective entity, see Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-73.

" . . . [W]hen she stopped, exhausted, under an orange tree covered in white flowers, he came rapidly towards her. He was red in the face, his black hair flopping on to his forehead, and he carried his jacket over his arm, but she didn't notice anything unusual about him. As she laughed and tried to catch her breath, he threw his jacket playfully over her head. She made to fend it off before it reached her, but it was covering her face as she felt his arms go round her. Hurriedly she pushed it out of the way, and his face was right next to hers, his breath on her, as hot as the sun. Still panting from her exertions, she looked inquiringly at him, then blew in his face to tease him. Her mind was completely blank. He squeezed her tight against him. She shouted at him and blew in his face again. A long time went by. Their bodies were touching; she felt her chest pressing against his, and her rapid breathing pushed her breasts up hard against him. At last she asked him to let her go. She was exhausted, her body and emotions in turmoil. She begged him not to bother her any more and to let her go. He held her tighter and tried to enclose her body within his broad thighs; she couldn't believe what was happening, was reluctant to acknowledge the reality. He tried to kiss her and she moved her mouth away; immediately, in another part of her body, she felt an instinctive movement from him, which told her clearly what he had in mind. She was a little surprised, but not afraid; another word from her would bring him to his senses. She wanted to get free of him and cut this dreadful current passing between them, and she pushed him away. She pushed him gently, somewhat disgusted at the idea which had come to her mind, but her resistance brought their bodies closer and he moved more urgently on the lower part of her stomach. Her limbs were tense, and her weary heart thudded with abnormal force. Her head turned involuntarily for a moment and she was staring straight into his burning eyes and up his broad nostrils, smelling the sweat on his fiery body. She took hold of his shoulders, trying again to break free from him, and felt his body bend towards her violently and his mouth clamp on to hers.

²⁰⁴ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 196.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

She shuddered, then took in a mouthful of air to avoid suffocating. At that moment she became fully aware of what was happening to her. The events fell rapidly into place in her mind and the sudden horror of the realization made her shake uncontrollably. She shouted something which she couldn't remember afterwards, then collapsed beneath his weight. While he was leaning against her, he had managed to draw one of her legs towards him and keep hold of it. She felt no pain as she hit the ground but as she became aware of her naked thighs she realized the extent of her humiliation. She was being treated like a dirty animal and had this overwhelming desire to cry with sorrow and anger and shame. He was pushing her skirt, and she clenched her legs together, then she aimed her fist at his head which was buried in her neck. He recoiled slightly and she saw his face, his crazed expression as he fought to hang on to his prey. He slapped her, then punched her in the jaw. Her body went slack momentarily, as she reeled from the impact of the blow. Her legs opened and he pulled off the rest of her clothes. For a split second she had a profound sense of what was happening to her: she was on the edge of the abyss, contemplating her end. Her whole life was concentrated in these few moments when her nakedness, her virginity, and the cruel vertigo within her merged, and she submitted. The fear came belatedly, fear of everything: the distant shadows, the hot earth under her buttocks, the sun, the knife piercing her entrails, the shuddering sighs and the blood which stained the trembling flesh.

She screamed and screamed and screamed, to stay alive, to stop her-self from going crazy. He stood in front of her, stupefied, panting for breath, then looked down and tried to cover up his bloody genitals. But she no longer saw him. He had left her world forever. She lay on the ground, which was spattered with her blood, and screamed, dry-eyed, in the spring sunshine among the blossoming orange trees."²⁰⁶

Both Elmessiri and Walther have pointed out the way that al-Takarlı depicts natural surroundings as either harmonious with the event that takes place in them or

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 201-203.

contradictory to it. This shows the extent of the irony in our lives, as is the case with Munīrah's rape,²⁰⁷ which takes place on Friday, being the holy day of the Muslim week. Afterwards, Munīrah cannot feel any kind of peace until she has menstruated, showing that she is not pregnant.²⁰⁸ Blood, in both the rape and the menstrual cycle, possesses two contrasting meanings for Munīrah. The first is the ruin of her future in a country with a very severe culture where woman's sexuality is concerned. The second is the chance of being able to live without shame if nature does not expose her secret.

As we read the description of 'Adnān's character and personality, we are convinced that he represents the beginnings of the Ba'th Party when its followers revelled in a glow of impetuosity that drove them to plot the assassination of 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim. If Munīrah represents all that is good in Iraq at that time, 'Adnān's act of rape represents the Ba'th Party's rapacious efforts to control and possess Iraq at the cost of violating its people, morals and heritage. The fact that he is related to most of the characters in the novel reminds us of how the party sprung from amongst this class and the extent to which the people of Iraq accepted its existence in its early stages. The fact that 'Adnān comes from the northern part of the country, as he was born in Houider in the Diyalah province and lives in Baqubah, substantiates the idea that he represents the Ba'th, because the most important figures of the party have their origins in this region.

Munīrah had isolated herself from the rest of her sister's family and stayed most of the time with her mother in their room, as hatred grew between her and the family.²⁰⁹ The only thing she thought of at that period was to escape from Baqubah and to return to Baghdad, where she belonged.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ For further discussion see Elmessiri, //weekly. ahram. org. eg/2001/542/bo2. htm and Wiebke Walther, "Distant Echoes of Love in the Narrative Work of Fu'ād al-Tikrī", in R. Allen et al (eds), op.cit., pp. 133-134.

²⁰⁸ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 203-205.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 214.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

This demonstrates how the plot of the novel is built upon the geography of urban places. Munīrah's contrast of the two cities supports the historical picture of violent political and social revolutionary movements emerging from the north of Iraq and attempting to dominate the rest of the country:

"So it was that, one afternoon towards the end of May, my mother and I left Baquba behind us. The fresh, damp air was heavy with the scent of the orchards, and I couldn't wait to abandon that unlucky town.

I didn't look behind me as we crossed the bridge and turned our faces to the horizon, and the black, winding road stretching ahead of us. Death, humiliation, and shame were back there, and didn't think I needed any of them. But to my surprise I wiped away a tear as the lines of green vanished into the distance. I remembered the songs, the faces, the fresh air, and the countryside, and contemplated the tiny thing which my life had been reduced to now.

We reached Baghdad in the late afternoon and made for the old quarter of Bab al-Shaykh, with its ancient houses and kindly relatives. We hadn't visited them for months, but this didn't mean the affection between us was diminished. As we sat drinking tea in the alcove, I felt as if I was immersed in the sun's warmth after the cold of winter. In a way I felt safe with them. . . . at least I wasn't going to die here."²¹¹

This began to create a kind of psychological separation between the two parts of the country. The people in the central and southern parts of Iraq started to treat anything coming from the north with suspicion.²¹² This is clear from the way that 'Abd al-Razzāq's family react towards 'Adnān in previous chapters of the novel. Munīrah's rape also accounts for her withdrawal into her own world in the Bāb al-Shaykh house. Only

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

²¹² For further discussion about the development of the narrative plot through the type of geographical division, see Franco Moretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-32, 70-140.

there can she go on enjoying the small pleasures of life without social condemnation, such as family gatherings and absorbing the beauty of nature.²¹³

However, Munīrah feels that the incident in the orchard will not allow her to live normally for long and her intuition when Midḥat asks her to marry him is correct.²¹⁴ The question that is implicit here is whether or not Baghdad, the city, that is symbolised by Midḥat's chaste love towards Munīrah, could give back to her the dignity that had been stolen from her in Baqubah. The answer to this question appears to be uncertain from the way she stumbles on their way back to the house and the dim light on the doorstep that makes Sanā', who is standing there, look as far away as a speck on the horizon. The light is a symbol of hope and Sanā', the future potential of the country. Both of them - the hope and the future - appear far away from Munīrah and her journey towards them is riddled with fears and potential dangers, implicit in Sanā's fear that scorpions might come out into the long passage at night. This could also be an indication of the hard parturition that the country has to go through in order to give birth to a brighter, stronger and healthier future.

Munīrah admits to herself her attraction towards 'Abd al-Karīm. We see that they understand each other,²¹⁵ because both have been damaged by the social breakdown, which was the cause of the agitation in Iraq. Both have suffered, without having done anything to deserve it. We now see the reason behind the similarities between 'Abd al-Karīm, Fu'ād and Munīrah, is what 'Abd al-Karīm senses instinctively in the earlier chapters of the novel, particularly the second. We also understand Munīrah's confusion when Madiḥa discusses the subject of Midḥat's proposal of marriage. Munīrah truly represents Iraq in that historical phase when each groups was vying for control of her: the new political party with its willingness to use devastating force ('Adnān); the group

²¹³ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit. pp. 203-206.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 208-212.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

that had tried to avoid involvement in politics, but was now beginning to realise their profound attachment to their country (Midḥat); and the weak group, that was arbitrarily affected by the changing features of life in the country and left disillusioned, disorientated and in need of a comfort ('Abd al-Karīm).

The family's house in Baghdad and Baghdad itself, which had at first provided Munīrah with the safety and security she needed after the aggression and hatred she had been subjected to in Baqubah and in her sister's house,²¹⁶ begins to change for her. The city and its people (her family in the old house), which had provided protection and support, begin to expect something in return from Munīrah, the reason we hear her saying: "[i]n Baquba, as time went by, I became focused on saving myself. I didn't sigh day and night as I did now, when I felt I was heading inexorably towards a locked door whose key they had cruelly given to me."²¹⁷ They want Munīrah to accept the marriage proposal of their elder son Midḥat because they want Munīrah, the symbol of the country to unite with them, the people of the country by this marriage. There is also pressure to reinforce social norms that a single woman's presence is disruptive and a marriage between cousins culturally preferable. Symbolically, in both respects, this marriage would represent a united front capable of facing the threatening political changes that were beginning to encroach on the city and their social fabric.

So Munīrah is asked to fulfil her social duty to the people to whom she belongs by sacrificing herself - as the woman in the Italian film did - by suppressing her own interests.²¹⁸ This confrontation between Munīrah and 'Abd al-Karīm about their feelings for each other helps her to reach her final decision. This is represented by the clarity of the sky that day and the openness of the terrace.²¹⁹ Rejecting the weakness that yields to death, represented by 'Abd al-Karīm - who now continually digs up the earth on the

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 214-215, 195, 206-208.

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 214-215.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 213.

terrace with his shoe as if he were digging a grave clinging to its walls and the empty beds that seem like coffins - Munīrah reaches the decision that she will marry Midḥat, because this choice seems to point to the continuation of life.

In the tenth chapter we learn of the consequences of Munīrah's marriage to Midḥat and the seeming futility of her sacrifice. The chapter is narrated through an external omniscient narrator whose voice again merges with the consciousness of the main character that the chapter is dealing with, Midḥat, as well as using the flashback technique to illustrate some of the interceding events. The author uses ellipsis in relation to Midḥat and Munīrah's marriage for the purpose of representing the effect of the event on Midḥat through his stream of consciousness.²²⁰ The first scene in the chapter begins when Midḥat is sitting alone in a public café, the Mrabba'ah Café, during the first days of Ramaḍān a few minutes before the breaking of the fast. Here we learn that he had left the family house four days previous after discovering his new wife was not a virgin. He is listening to the conversation of two Christians who appear to be from the north of the country, comparing the painful situation of one of them with that of Sa'id, one of his old friends, who he had happened to meet in that same café. Later, he remembers Munīrah and his relationship with her as he wanders through the noisy crowded streets of Baghdad, especially in the main street, al-Rashīd Street. He passes by many places in al-Rashīd Street and in the streets branching off it, for example Ārām's pastry shop, the 'Ush al-Dhabī restaurant, the al-Sha'ab cinema and al-Sīnk alley. Midḥat is trying to gain some perspective on his relationship with his wife Munīrah, outside of the social and familial rules that govern his perspective inside the old house. He is trying to find a real meaning in such a relationship in the open spaces of the city, where their romance was initiated. The city is full of political frustrations, which would lead to major social upheavals in the lives of its inhabitants, indicated by the large picture of 'Abd al-Karīm

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 218-224.

Qāsim that hangs in front of the al-Sha'ab cinema, the conversation between the two Christians in the café, and the partial memory loss of Sa'īd, who used to be regarded as an intellectual.²²¹ Midḥat remembers how keen he had been to marry Munīrah, in spite of her hesitation, from the confused signals that she sent out at the time that she asked him not to leave her.²²² He also remembers how their love began to flourish in the corners of the old house, surrounded by the traditional family atmosphere,²²³ just like any other family in Baghdad. Midḥat is trying to understand the true nature of his relationship with her by recalling these memories to find the reason that had prevented her from telling him about her loss of virginity, the shock and betrayal of which had made him abandon everything that had been of value to him.²²⁴

On his introspective journey across the city, Midḥat decides he must look outward, to what has been happening to his country, in order to rejoin public life and break down the bars of his solitude. Although launching himself into a more active politically aware life, he feels that without the woman he loves, his new life will be bare, empty and cold, just like his room in the al-Raṣāfah hotel.²²⁵ Midḥat is shocked at his sudden change of fortune and its connection to the major changes that were taking place in Baghdad and the whole of Iraq, of which he had not formerly been aware. The speed of the cars in the streets point to the rapidity of these changes, their negative nature represented in the political hypocrisy; the conversation of the two Christian men; what had happened to Sa'īd; the separation of his sister from her husband; 'Abd al-Karīm's breakdown after his friend's death; 'Adnān's assault on Munīrah and her loss of virginity. Midḥat cannot

²²⁰ For further information on the technique of the novel, see Gérard Genette, *op.cit.*, pp. 94,106-112 and Seymour Chatman, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-68.

²²¹ *The Long Way Back*, *op.cit.*, pp. 225-236.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp. 227-230,233.

²²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232,234.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233. For further discussion on the intimacy or lack of intimacy that the description of an interior reflects in a work of narrative, see Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 183-210.

accept his discovery of Munīrah's lost virginity and feels a desire to commit suicide.²²⁶ Although his love for Munīrah had helped him to get rid of his egotism, he, like the rest of his generation in Iraq, is still too weak - perceptible in the weakness he felt in al-Sīnk alley that made him trip on a stone - to withstand the negative stands against forces taking over his country or help the love of his life Munīrah/Iraq to deal with them. There is a parallel with Midḥat's lack of resolve to take action against his wife's attacker. It is easier to direct blame against the victim herself and assume the victim's role for himself. His feelings and those of his entire generation towards life at that very moment are reflected on al-Sīnk alley, where he is standing. The dullness, dirtiness and gloom of the life of its inhabitants represent that of the majority of the people in the rest of the country.²²⁷

Midḥat's country hurt him deeply - alluded to in the description of the protruding stones of one of the alley's walls digging into his bones - and he is ashamed of this squalid situation projected by the deep pothole filled with dirty water into which his feet disappear.²²⁸ He feels that he is a vagrant or outcast whose fate is bound to the darkness of an unstable and unpredictable tomorrow.²²⁹ He and his generation are far away from having any kind of faith, indicated by the distant voice that was reading the Qurā'n.²³⁰ He feels hopeless and desperate.

This desperation drives him to dissociate himself from his usual life and moral values, by going to Uwwānīs during the days of the holy month of Ramaḍan.²³¹ He tries to find some comfort there with a group of people who are opposed to the present course of the nation. But even here, he finds people who are tainted and possibly untrustworthy,

²²⁶ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 233.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-236.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 234, 236.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-252.

as illustrated by the way that Ḥusayn is nervous about some of them,²³² such as Abū 'Ab'ūb, the simple shepherd who had married the woman he loved to conceal the scandal that she had caused, but is now shunned by his community.²³³ The only positive thing about this group is that they are aware of the conflicts, which are taking place in their lives. They freely admit their disapproval of those conflicts while at the same time confessing their inability to change things. This comes across in Ḥusayn's opinion about Abū Ab'ūb's marriage,²³⁴ Abū Ab'ūb's homesickness and longing for his old simple uncomplicated life and in Abū Shākir's dream that symbolised the desire for change but the inability to effect it.²³⁵ Even here, Miḍḥat does not stop recalling his memories about the relationship between him and Munīrah, trying to understand what had suddenly gone wrong between them.²³⁶ He remembers how he had kissed her before they got married and how a button had torn her dress because of its tightness when he wanted to touch her. Remembering this fact alerts him to the irony between the tight opening of the dress and how easily he had entered her on their wedding night because of her broken hymen.²³⁷ He also remembers here - where people at least have the courage to reveal the defects of their lives without hypocrisy - how Munīrah was always so confused,²³⁸ as if she wanted to tell him something before their marriage and even on their wedding night, but was afraid to take the risk. What he cannot understand is the reason for the fear that had not allowed her to be open with him. The fact that Miḍḥat feels he has to put space and barriers between himself and Munīrah by leaving his family home underscores the defective strictures of male - female relationships where ostracisation is chosen over communication. His desperation drives him further into the underbelly of peripheral life in the city. The geographical distance he puts between himself and the family house is

²³² Ibid., pp. 240-241.

²³³ Ibid., pp. 236,238-241.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

²³⁵ Ibid., pp. 242-243,251.

²³⁶ Ibid., pp. 242-246,251-254,258-259.

²³⁷ Ibid., pp. 242-243,246,251-254,257-259.

both a literal escape from his problems and an effort to obtain some perspective on the fear, the nature of the relations and perhaps the inherited traditions that had led to his wife's deceit. He refuses to listen to Ḥusayn's advice to go back to his wife and his family and not to fall into the empty bohemian life of Baghdad as he, Ḥusayn, had done.²³⁹ Ḥusayn now regrets his choice and admits he had always felt that Miḍḥat represented hope of a better future for people like him, which was why he encourages Miḍḥat in this way. But Miḍḥat insists on entering Ḥusayn's shadowy half-world where people live below the acceptable standard of living, represented by the Kurdish quarter and the house where Ḥusayn's relatives live.²⁴⁰

The eleventh chapter is constructed upon dialogues that take place between the characters of the novel, the voice of the external omniscient narrator merged with Sanā's consciousness and the use of the flashback technique. It portrays the agitation of the whole family due to Miḍḥat's disappearance immediately after his wedding night, for one-week.²⁴¹ The chapter begins with Sanā' and Suhā returning home from school.²⁴² This scene emphasises the differences between the characters of the two sisters. Suhā, Madiḥa's elder daughter, only cares about experiencing any kind of gratification available to her, which is the opposite of Sanā', who always cares about others and tries to help them.²⁴³ The depiction of Suhā's personality here confirms what has been said earlier in this study about the idea represented by Sanā's character. The fact that Sanā' is younger than Suhā suggests that it could be generations before Iraq benefits from citizens prepared to take responsibility for improving the nation. At the same time it

²³⁸ Ibid., pp. 248-249.

²³⁹ Ibid., pp. 238-239, 256-258.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 274.

²⁴² Ibid., pp. 261-263.

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. 261-264, 266-267, 271-273, 275, 282-283, 285.

emphasises, like the rape of Munīrah, how Iraq has been continually exploited and left exhausted.²⁴⁴

The day Sanā' wakes up to find her uncle missing is Friday, Islam's holy day. This could show that rejecting Munīrah was in accordance with God's will or underscore the double injustice, Munīrah has suffered, as Friday was also the day on which she was raped. Sanā' is upset when she cannot get near Munīrah and senses that the rest of the family are avoiding her as if she had been condemned in that house. Munīrah's existence is marginalised.²⁴⁵ It is clear that the family, who represent different contemporary historical phases of Iraq and its people, have rejected Munīrah, who symbolises the present situation of Iraq, because she has violated the social traditions of her culture even though she was only a victim of her attacker. This rejection is reflected in her changed relationship to the old house and her confinement to her room. The whole situation bewilders the child, Sanā' and makes her experience fatigue and powerlessness as she cannot help Munīrah,²⁴⁶ to whom she is emotionally attached. This attachment symbolises the potential for a mutually supportive relationship between the country and its people. However, the rape of Munīrah and the family's efforts to keep her and Sanā' apart indicates the obstructions society itself presents to having a better future. The loss of innocence is implicit in the image of Sanā' treading in the mud and the edge of her white shoe becoming splashed with dark specks of mud.²⁴⁷

The family is soon interrupted by an important event, which confronts all of them with the sweeping and frightful changes that are taking place outside the safe confines of the old house. Sanā's estranged father Ḥusayn, represents the frivolous part of a generation that had abandoned their responsibilities towards their country, symbolised

²⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 267,269,271,276-277,281,284.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 262,264,266-267,270-271,274-277,280.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 262-263,266,274.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 262.

by Madīḥa and its future, symbolised by Sanā'.²⁴⁸ Ḥusayn cannot find his way through the dim corridor of the house,²⁴⁹ just as he cannot find his way through the life because of his depression and despair. Ḥusayn's visit to the family makes them feel that all the conflicting aspects of life in Baghdad are forcing their lives into a new phase, which makes Madīḥa, Munīrah and Sanā' gather together.²⁵⁰ It is as if the whole of Iraq, with all its contemporary historical and future phases, has a chance to draw strength from one another and address the dangers they face together. This could be done by rescuing Midḥat, who symbolises the other part of the present generation in which the country still has some hope.

All the family enter the grandfather's room so they can listen to the news of Midḥat that Ḥusayn has brought them. The plot becomes more complicated in this chapter, as narrative strands and political events are drawn together. This complexity makes Sanā' uncomfortable. Her feelings of fear are reflected in the darkness of her grandfather's room.²⁵¹ Sanā's position in her grandfather's room is summed in the following sentence: "[s]he breathed in sharply and withdrew into her corner."²⁵² She is trying to find a place that could provide her with the kind of protection and shelter she is beginning to lack in the old house.

The grandfather starts talking to Ḥusayn about the country's political situation and the threats to 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim, predicting what will happen next. Beginning the conversation with this topic stresses the connection between the unstable political situation and the problem between Munīrah and Midḥat.²⁵³ The grandfather gives Ḥusayn an oral message to deliver to Midḥat, consisting of an extract from the Qur'ān which indicates the path of faith and forgiveness that Midḥat should take in order to start

²⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 267,276,284,286.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 287.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 286-287,298.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 288.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 289.

afresh with his married life. The religious quotation also seems to transcend the realm of familial advice and offer the only way for the Iraqis to achieve real salvation from the current social and political disintegration all around them.²⁵⁴

We perceive Sanā's heightened feelings of discomfort, insecurity, confusion and helplessness.²⁵⁵ In order to free herself from such feelings and because of her love for Munīrah and Midḥat, she does not hesitate in following her father outside the house to give him Munīrah's letter to Midḥat as Munīrah requested.²⁵⁶ By doing this, Sanā' wants to participate in what is going on, especially if she can help the two people she loves most. The dark alley which Sanā' has to go through to reach her father is shaded by a huge jujube tree and is only slightly illuminated by the faint light of a distant street lamp.²⁵⁷ The darkness of the alley symbolises the dreadfulness of the changes presently consuming the city and, therefore, the necessity of maintaining a strong faith. Faith is represented by the faint light of the lamp and the huge jujube tree, known in Arabic as Sudrat al-Muntaha that is regarded in Islam as a blessed tree.²⁵⁸ But Ḥusāin - whose character symbolises the irresponsible part of his generation in Iraq - cannot be the right person to deliver the messages from 'Abd al-Razzāq and Munīrah to Midḥat. His neglect in asking about his daughters during his visit to the family's house, his inability to recognise the calls of his daughter Sanā' and the unbearable smell that Sanā' was aware of when she kisses him,²⁵⁹ are all indications of how this part of his generation had given up self respect, free will, and responsibility.

²⁵³ Ibid, p. 288.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 291-292. For further discussion, see: Q 33: 33-45; al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, op.cit., p. 418.

²⁵⁵ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 292-294.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 294-299.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 295-296.

²⁵⁸ The Sudrat al-Muntaha is mentioned in: Q 34: 16, 53: 14-18, 56: 18,28. For further information on it, see al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, op.cit., pp. 489,526,534.

²⁵⁹ *The Long way Back*, op.cit., pp. 293,296-297.

The twelfth chapter is the only chapter in the novel that has a title. The title in Arabic is *Al-Zakhām wal-Baqā'* and the English translation is *Brief Shining and Survival*. As we read this chapter, we realise that the writer gave it a title because it describes the transformation that takes place in Midḥat's character and how he changes from a person disheartened by the problems in his relationship with his wife to a person who is completely attached to life. He liberates himself from the negative aspects of his culture, which he had let himself be influenced by and decides to return to married life. The chapter proves that through his ordeal, Midḥat has become a dynamic, rounded character and shows the stages of this transformation.²⁶⁰ This chapter begins like the previous one, with Midḥat's situation a week after his departure but it takes the story forward. It is, in fact, the day after Ḥusayn's visit to the family house.²⁶¹ This chapter is again narrated through the external omniscient narrator, whose voice merges with Midḥat's consciousness. It also uses the flashback technique especially between the two days that the chapter is concerned with, Friday and Saturday.

Above all, this chapter is concerned with how part of a generation, symbolised by the character of Midḥat had the chance to free and liberate itself from negative traditional social attitudes, in order to reunite itself with the motherland but this time being much more considerate about the real needs of the motherland, symbolised by Munīrah.

The chapter begins at dawn on Friday in Ḥusayn's aunt's house,²⁶² when Midḥat awakes suddenly from his sleep because of a nightmare that he has had.²⁶³ He dreamed that he was killing Munīrah who was standing against a mud wall and did not show any kind of resistance. The dream here shows Midḥat's desire to apply the punishment that his culture demands in cases such as Munīrah's. The mud wall, upon which Munrah is leaning, is a symbol of her situation, which is considered to have sullied her reputation.

²⁶⁰ For further information see Seymour Chatman, op.cit., pp.107-138.

²⁶¹ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp.306-310.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 302.

Munīrah's surrender to her fate by not resisting Midḥat symbolises the reality of the exhausted country with all the negative prohibitions that its people were living under.²⁶⁴ The sentence: "[e]nough. Enough death. Enough purging the shame. Enough of wanting to cleanse the air with your blood and erase the stars with your fingers,"²⁶⁵ which Midḥat heard Munīrah saying in his dream vocalises the mental struggle that is going on inside him. He wants to obey the rules of his culture but at the same time he wants to be with her and recognises in his heart the futility of these old tribal attitudes to life.

The dream occupies his thoughts during the rest of the day and contributes to his mental struggle and conflict.²⁶⁶ He feels that his life is as empty as the life in Baghdad at that time, as represented by the barren, impoverished state of the Kurdish quarter where he is staying. Midḥat's feelings are reflected in spastic décor of Ḥusayn's room and the rest of the house. Midḥat's surroundings forced him to realise the meaninglessness, rottenness and distortion of his life as a human being in the city at that time, emphasised by the filthy towel, the cold floor and the mirror that reminds him of the eyes of the dog dying in the street.²⁶⁷ Midḥat starts to realise why Munīrah did not tell him about the loss of her virginity although he knew that she had wanted to.²⁶⁸ What had stopped her was her understanding of their culture, which decreed that he should either leave her or kill her. Midḥat begins to understand the impossible situation that confronted Munīrah, symbolised by the high window that afforded such knowledge and perception, also

²⁶³ Ibid, pp. 301, 307-309.

²⁶⁴ On dreams Bakhtin says: "Characteristically, visions and dreams have a very different meaning . . . dreams and visions make men aware of the will of the gods or of chance; they could not be used as a means for avoiding the blows of fate or of taking measures against such a fate, but were granted rather 'that men may bear their sufferings more easily' . . . Dreams and visions, therefore, do not incite the heroes to any activity . . . , on the contrary, dreams and visions provide instructions to the heroes, telling them what to do, how to act in order to change their fate; that is they force the heroes to take definite steps, to act", M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 117.

²⁶⁵ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 309.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 303-308.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 302-303, 313-314.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 360-361.

indicated by the moonlight and then by the bright light of day.²⁶⁹ Once he recognises the impossibility of Munīrah's situation, he begins to emerge from his selfishness and realise the great mistake that he had made by abandoning her.²⁷⁰ Midḥat starts to search for salvation from the destructive effects of the traditions of his culture by returning to the essence of his religion. He finds the meaning that he was searching for in Sūrah no. 81 of the Qur'ān which denounces the tradition of female infanticide of the pre-Islamic Arabs.²⁷¹

While Midḥat is having this inner revelation on that beautiful bright Friday morning, the Ba'th party revolution against 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim begins.²⁷² Frequently a contrast between emotional events and the environment is made stressing life's irony. The contrast between the atmosphere and the event that takes place as well as the fact that it took place on the Islamic holy day, reminds us of the scene describing the rape of Munīrah in the ninth chapter of the novel, as if there were a connection between the two scenes. Indeed, we are reminded of 'Adnān and his violent, erratic personality. Midḥat then begins to experience feelings of melancholy and to have premonitions of his own death, which suggests this revolution will be a destructive one.²⁷³ The author's point of view on this becomes clear through the following description of events. The Ba'thist revolutionaries initially blockaded and bombed the Kurdish quarter located in the north-west of Baghdad, because most of its inhabitants were amongst the Kurdish and Shi'ite supporters of 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim. All of the people in this quarter were killed or arrested by the revolutionaries.²⁷⁴ This event is an indication of the oppression of both these groups by the Ba'th party, an oppression that continues to happen even in the present times.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 302-303,309,360-361,365.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 303.

²⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 308,318.

²⁷² Ibid., pp. 312,314-315/317.

²⁷³ Ibid., pp. 312-314,318-319,356.

Midḥat recognises that the whole of Baghdad is erupting and the only thing that Midḥat is aware of is his wish to be with his family in Bāb al-Shaykh and he does not even pay attention to Ḥusayn's hints about wanting to talk with him about an important matter.²⁷⁵ All he can think of in these moments of fear that suddenly attacked the people of that angry city is to be beside his wife, whom he had to protect. During the surge of fear caused by the sudden outbreak of violence, he finally understands the reason that had made Munīrah marry him without telling him about her rape.²⁷⁶ It was the fact that "[s]he had not only given herself to him, he knew that. She had entrusted him with her shame, mixing it with his love, their two lives, his memories and dreams, and slept in his arms, resigned to his judgement, whatever it might be."²⁷⁷

This Kurdish quarter remains under siege the next day even after the assassination of 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim. Ḥusayn leaves the house on Friday evening without telling Midḥat anything about the messages that he had from Midḥat's father and from Munīrah.²⁷⁸ It is an overcast, rainy Saturday,²⁷⁹ as if the darkness and the heavy rain directly collude with the cataclysmic anger collateral with this revolution. The premonitions of extinction that had possessed Midḥat on the previous day are transferred to the Ḥajjī, (the husband of Ḥusayn's aunt), whose character symbolises an era that was known to be severe and merciless and who feels that that era is returning with only slightly different features.²⁸⁰ These feelings possess Midḥat again but this time are transformed into a desire to resist destruction. He suddenly feels that his people deserve to live in any way they chose,²⁸¹ so he comes to a decision to return to his family and his

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. vi.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 315-316, 320-321.

²⁷⁶ For further discussion see Wiebke Walther, "Distant Echoes of Love in the Narrative Work of Fu'ād al-Tikrītī", op.cit., p. 136.

²⁷⁷ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 324-325.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 356.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 355, 357-358, 364-365, 367, 369.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 358.

²⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 359, 362-363.

wife whose faithfulness he is sure of.²⁸² Having attained self-knowledge, Midḥat, is able to see how the world of the Iraqis has collapsed around them, although they had committed no crime, other than surrendering to the destructive logic of events.²⁸³ This is a clue to al-Takarī's desire to provoke self-knowledge and thus an objective perspective from which Iraqis can regain control over their own destiny.

The revolution had succeeded in sowing the seeds of dissent between the different groups of the Iraqi nation from its very first day, particularly with respect to religious faith and ethnic belonging. This can be ascertained from the amount of fear, distrust and hostility that the little girl Juwānā and the young man who was with her showed towards Midḥat and by the fact that the encounter took place in the Ḥusayniyyah.²⁸⁴ This idea is confirmed by the feelings of distrust that Midḥat had towards the little girl over the direction she had given him to exit.²⁸⁵ The character of Juwānā symbolises Iraq in the near future just as Sanā' does, because of her age and sex, although her character is already tarnished by the events of the new political era.

Midḥat accomplishes his self-knowledge and freedom from false values too late, as if the political forces that had already taken over will not allow the survival of such a potentially threatening symbol. Midḥat is killed in an undignified way by a deadly shot from the revolutionaries, the mud splattering his body on the asphalt of the street.²⁸⁶ The speeding car and the streets of Baghdad at that moment inaugurate the new erratic tempo of life in a city, which will devour its own people without reason.²⁸⁷ Such accidents are indicative of the loss of security in the city, which is fast becoming a mass cemetery. The members of the new revolution were killing to build a new world, thinking that

²⁸² Ibid., pp. 356-357, 365-369, 371, 378.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 376.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 370-371.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 372-374.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 378.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 376.

"they must accept their role as criminals, until finally everyone on earth will be innocent."²⁸⁸ Baghdad, therefore became a theatre for political violence.²⁸⁹

The thirteenth and final chapter begins two weeks after the death of Midḥat during the last few days of Ramaḍān.²⁹⁰ It is narrated directly from 'Abd al-Karīm's stream of consciousness and the flashback technique. 'Abd al-Karīm's thoughts fluctuate between his present situation in front of the hospital after visiting Ḥusayn and the visit that he, his sister and her two daughters made a few moments ago, with flashbacks connecting this visit to the death of Midḥat revealing 'Abd al-Karīm's view of the Ba'th revolution.

After the victory of the revolution and his brother's death, 'Abd al-Karīm feels that he should detach himself from the world around him,²⁹¹ so as not to be involved in the bestial genocide that the irrational new world of Baghdad was inflicting on its people. The insane logic of the new regime is reflected by Ḥusayn who is being treated for his alcoholism as a probationary pioneer in the new era. Ḥusayn is enjoying all the medical, mental and social care that he needs. It is as if the Ba'th is conducting an experiment to reanimate a whole section of the generation that had degenerated in previous years, in order to groom it for service of the new regime.²⁹² 'Abd al-Karīm realises that Ḥusayn had accepted the treatment out of fear and not from any real interest in living his life. The fear that dominated most of Ḥusayn's type was of ending up dead like the other part of it, represented by Midḥat. That fear led them to accept everything the revolution brought into their lives. In fact the group to which Ḥusayn belonged helped the new regime to root their destructive political and social conflicts deep inside the lives of the

²⁸⁸ Vincenzo Ruggiero, *Crime in Sociology of Deviance and Fiction Literature* (London/New York, Verso, 2003), p. 21.

²⁸⁹ For a further analysis of the way that geography affects the development of political conflicts, see Franco Moretti, pp. 29-32, 70-73 and Vincenzo Ruggiero, op.cit., pp. 9-27.

²⁹⁰ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., p. 340.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 328.

²⁹² For a discussion of how political regimes use institutions to reform and regulate individuals, see Elaine Scarry, op.cit., pp. 42-45.

rest of the nation.²⁹³ So 'Abd al-Karīm is surprised at Ḥusayn's optimism when they visit him in the hospital, since he wonders how his brother-in-law could have such a feeling when their lives in the city were "surrounded by the ruins of an innocent world. How could someone find life beautiful when death was closing in on the horizon?"²⁹⁴

In fact, the hospital where Ḥusayn is being treated is depicted as an instrument in the hands of the new government for engineering people in the way that will be useful to its interests,²⁹⁵ just as it was used in the previous era as a place of torture (Fu'ād's agonising death there/in the second chapter of the novel). Ḥusayn's character develops throughout the novel in different psychological stages from a responsible person to a frivolous one and then to a someone who could be used as a well-ordered voice for political machinations. The reforming of his character reflects the newly reformed map of Baghdad, politically and socially. The spring weather in the city at the time is an irony purposely mentioned by the writer to show the extent of the contradictions, which Baghdad endured in this new social era.

'Abd al-Karīm is as suspicious of the new era's political and social projects, as he is of the people who represent it, such as Ḥusayn and 'Adnān. He is sure that Ḥusayn had not given Midḥat the messages which were sent to him by his father, 'Abd al-Razzāq and Munīrah,²⁹⁶ which indicate that such people cannot be trusted, because they are already corrupted. His opinion of the new regime is reinforced by the anxiety, restlessness, fear and sorrow of Munīrah and his family's over Midḥat's disappearance and death and by the destruction of the Kurdish quarter and Sanā's depression, which is a reflection of the negative impact these times will have on the psychology of the coming generation.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ *The Long Way Back*, op.cit., pp. 327-332.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 331,339.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-337.

'Abd al-Karīm knows that he had made many errors because he failed to properly understand what was going around him. This led him to act in a selfish way, refusing to take responsibility for engaging with the world in order to change it for the better. He realises that his attitude towards the case of his friend, Fu'ād, and Munīrah's marriage to his brother may have contributed to the loss of the three people whom he most loved. 'Abd al-Karīm knows that his group of the current generation is suppressed and debilitated.²⁹⁸ We sense this from the way he describes the aftermath of his brother's death, when he says: "[w]e buried my brother Midḥat with our imaginations and didn't let our sorrow inconvenience anyone. Until the end we remained embarrassed and bewildered, unaffected by myths of martyrs or heroes. Relatives and a few friends came shyly to offer their sympathy."²⁹⁹

Debilitation and sorrow prevent 'Abd al-Karīm from taking a fully active part in life. Rather, he gains some peace of mind by remaining on the margins of life, behind a thick partition that he cannot penetrate. This is illustrated by Munīrah's rejection of his love for her while he is standing talking to her on the threshold of her bedroom and then by his closing the door as he leaves.³⁰⁰

Conclusion

The last chapter divides the two parts of the twelfth chapter. The reason for this is to emphasise the termination of Midḥat's mental and psychological progress, the aim of which was to overturn the antiquated negative traditions that were a result of the unstable political situation in the country. We know of his death in chapter thirteen but witness it with a terrible sense of finality in the second part of the twelfth chapter. The

²⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 342,347-348.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.342.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 349,354.

writer uses the stream of consciousness technique almost entirely in chapter: 2, 4, 7 and 13. These are the chapters that deal with the characters of 'Abd al-Karīm and Ḥusayn.

The heroic novel is turned on its head as it is the weak and mentally unstable characters: 'Abd al-Karīm, Ḥusayn and 'Adnān, who survive. That those who had most lacked moral resolve are favoured, while those who showed courage are crushed and ostracised, most clearly maps out the perverse logic that will govern Iraq in the coming years. Thus al-Takarlī not only makes a political statement against the Ba'th but he also avoids laying blame on any particular character. We gain a sense that each are conditioned by their cultural norms yet there are chances to defer to or challenge them. It is frequently the lack of the character's faith in themselves to challenge the prevailing norms or unite against forces bigger than themselves, that leads to a negative conclusion. This fact becomes a normal result because of the destruction that was taking over Baghdad because of the Ba'th Party, that changed the city's map socially, culturally and politically by deepening the negative and decayed traditions in the city and the rest of the country. Therefore, Baghdad that was once known to all its inhabitants and to all the Iraqis as being the safe heaven for the whole of Iraq started to become ambiguous frightening. This is reflected clearly by the type of life that has changed dramatically inside the old house of 'Abd al-Razzāq's family in the ancient quarter of Bāb al-Shaykh, which led to the disintegration of all the relationships of the members within that family. Traits such as distrust, cowardness, dishonesty, unfaithfulness and absurdism began to spread out in the city and its people deforming their relationships with each other. Consequently Baghdad stopped being the safe refuge and shelter, as Munīrah once described it after running away from Baqubah:

"We reached Baghdad . . . and made for the old quarter of Bab al-Shaykh, with its ancient houses and kindly relatives . . . As we sat drinking tea in the alcove, I felt as I was immersed in the sun's

warmth after the cold of winter. In a way, I felt safe with them . . . at least I wasn't going to die here."³⁰¹

In this novel al-Takarlī makes it clear for his readers that not only the map of Baghdad has changed, but also the map of the rest of Iraq because of one political and social separation that occurred between the different cities in the country. This is indicated very clearly in the relation between Baghdad and the northern cities of the country beginning from Baqubah. This fact is portrayed by 'Adnān's relationship with his aunt Munīrah, and also by the suspicious relation that connects him with the rest of 'Abd al-Razzāq's family. Al-Takarlī is condemning the areas that backed up the Ba'th Party and that were the source from where that political party originated.

In *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, al-Takarlī lays out openly the main themes and problems that he will elaborate on in the following two novels, where he will sketch the modern features of Baghdad in a significant literary way.

³⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

Chapter 2

Khātām al-Raml

Synopsis of *Khātām al-Raml*

Khātām al-Raml, al-Takarlī's second novel,¹ was written in 1995. Its historie or fabula, tells of the unhappy events in the life of an Iraqi family which lead to the death of the mother and her son. The family consists of: the father, the mother Sanā', their son Hāshim, Uncle Ra'ūf, the mother's half brother and Aunt Qādriyyah, the father's sister.

The narrative time-span is the seventies and early eighties, ending in 1984.² The novel deals with the disintegration of Iraqi society at a time of growing political corruption. The sjuzet takes place in the city of Baghdad and is revealed through the consciousness of the protagonist,³ Hāshim, who is portrayed as an introvert and damaged man. There is complex interaction between his current reality and past memories and there is often confusion in the novel between what is current and what is remembered. This complexity could be a reflection of the disintegration of Iraqi society in the seventies and early eighties and the people's lack of grip on their present reality. The narration of the story runs in a smooth and continuous stream of consciousness that allows the narrator to move from one topic to another with no clear textual division, corresponding to the intricate and gloomy course of events. This makes *Khātām al-Raml* one of the novels that is simultaneously a mixture of depiction and narration which could be considered as an excellent way of involving the reader.⁴

The novel is entirely written in the first person, even to the extent of the writer depicting his own death, which makes it very clear that the protagonist, Hāshim, is the

¹ It consists of 154 pages.

² Fuā'd al-Takarlī, *Kātām al-Raml* (Beirut, Dār al-Ādāb, 1995), pp. 13-14,39,52-53.

³ Fārūq 'Abd al-Qādir, op.cit., pp. 56-58.

creation of the implied narrator. The questions that arise here are twofold: why is the author an implied narrator in this novel? And what is the relationship between the author and the protagonist? To answer these questions, we have to consider what kind of character Hāshim is and the ideological stance he embodies. Hāshim can be said to be:

“something more than a creation of language or a function in the total context of the play.

He is the sort of man who in such and such a situation would do so and so. This is the kind of remark we constantly use in real life, when discussing somebody's character [it is] legitimate when applied to the larger scope of novel.”⁵

In fact, al-Takarlī's characters, especially the hero, are more than the embodiment of real life. The protagonist in this novel expresses - in Bakhtin's words - “a particular point of view on the world and on [himself], as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality.”⁶ Al-Takarlī is interested in expressing the reality of his country and the experience of its individuals in literary form as this offers the greatest potential for exploring the inter-play of conflicting and subjective perception. The way in which the novel's end makes clear that the authors voice is merged with both the implied narrator and the protagonist. Although we can say that the authorial idea receives: “direct expression in the ideological position of the main hero”⁷, *Khātam al-Raml* is not monologic as its other characters are provided space in which to articulate their world view through the dialogue related to the hero. This is exactly the type of relationship that al-Takarlī tries to establish within his characters and especially with the protagonist Hāshim, as well as between them and the implied narrator.

The title *Khātam al-Raml*, which can be translated as *Ring of Sand*, is also metaphorical. Illusory as it is, it depicts the transient and delicate relationship that a man

⁴ On this subject, see Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic: and other Essays*, op.cit., pp. 110-148.

⁵ W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca/New York, 1970), pp. 204-205.

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 48.

can have with place (country/city), or time (his past or current life or even his future). The main point that this analysis intends to illuminate how Hāshim's interaction with place, leads us to understand how social and geographical engineering has affected Iraqi pride and politics. Our study will concentrate on three main aspects through which this relationship develops:

1- The places with which Hāshim interacts in Baghdad, such as: his childhood house; the new house; Ra'ūf's house; his office at the architectural company for which he works; the al-Riwāq Hall; al-Ulwiyyah Club; the Fārūq Restaurant; the Baghdad Hotel; the graveyard; the hospital.

2- The relationship of Hāshim with the two parts of Baghdad: the old and the new.

3- The meaning of the symbols widely used throughout the novel and their relationship with the aspect of space, such as: the car; music, the river, the red spot; rain; the wetness of the earth; leaves of trees; the nabq tree; the fig leaf; the tree in the graveyard; Hāshim's wish to draw a large map of the past.

These three points will be discussed in sequence with events in the novel with particular reference to the competing visions of the city and their effect on the individual psyche.

Analysis of the Novel

All the events of the novel take place in Baghdad. In fact, in the very centre of the city, so that we can confidently say the map of events in the novel is encircled within the borders of Baghdad with particular concentration on the centre. The theme of internal/external - (public space/private space) - that was introduced in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* is further explored this with reference to not only the rules governing behaviour but also

⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

to the encroachment of the state onto personal space and the new boundaries of social acceptance being forged.

"Outside and inside . . . has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative. Logicians draw circles that overlap or exclude each other, and all their rules immediately become clear. Philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being. Thus profound metaphysics is rooted in an implicit geometry which - whether we will or no - confers spatiality upon thought; if a metaphysician could not draw, what would he think? Open and closed, for him, are thoughts. They are metaphors that he attaches to everything, even to his system. In a lecture given by Jean Hyppolite on the subtle structure of denegation (which is quite different from the simple structure of negation) Hyppolite spoke of 'a first myth of outside and inside'. And he added: 'you feel the full significance of this myth of outside and inside in alienation, which is founded on these two terms. Beyond what is expressed in their formal opposition lie alienation and hostility between the two.'"⁸

Al-Takarlī uses open and closed spaces in the novel to either reinforce or contrast with, perceived dichotomies such as: security/insecurity; familiarity/unfamiliarity; solitude/company and inclusion/exclusion. Of the social phenomena explored throughout the trilogy, marginalisation, alienation and, withdrawal from the company of others feature heavily. In *Khātam al-Raml*, the protagonist is portrayed particularly susceptible to his surroundings; his isolation often emphasised in contrast to the busy public place in which he is.

Place names in Baghdad such as al-Jisr al-Mu'alaq, the Kamāl Jumblāt public square, al-Jādriyyah, al-Sa'dūn Street, Abū Nuwās Street, the al-Nu'mān hospital, the cemetery of the royal family, the al-A'zāmiyyah Corniche, the Bāb al-Shaykh quarter, al-Jisr al-

Ḥadīdī, the suburbs, the beginning of the Baqubah highway, Banī-Sa'ad Inn, the Darrāgh quarter, Arba'ta'shar Tammūz Street, al-A'zāmiyyah, al-Ḥārthiyyah, al-Kāzamiyyah, al-Raṣāfah, al-Kārkh and the River Tigris constitute the universe of the novel. The only place that we can consider as having any connection with the world outside of Baghdad is the highway that links it to Baqubah. The narrator/protagonist describes this highway, the only space that reaches outside the capital in the novel, in a very vague way. The reason for this could be the interest of the writer in exposing all the negative political and social factors that directly affect the centre of the country, which is, at the same time, the centre of the political regime in Iraq.

The spaces in Baghdad that are discussed in this study, whether open or closed, are mostly pre-existing ones. What is meant by the description 'new' here are the new constructions that have been erected by the ruling party in historic areas of the city, the original character of which has been totally altered by renovations or clearances.⁹

We learn about the protagonist, Hāshim, from the flow of his thoughts, which leads us to understand his world-view. Observing his actions towards his environment, especially those that occur so frequently that they could be considered as habits or traits, allows us to see the development of his personality,¹⁰ through his deep connection to the original cityscape. This connection and interaction between protagonist and the different parts of his city also adds depth to the events of the novel.

The theme of *Khātam al-Raml* is a nation's struggle to maintain its identity by preserving the authenticity of its history; an idea symbolised by the character of Hāshim. The novel shows, through its protagonist's fate, that this aim will not be achieved easily

⁸ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., cited in Jean Hyppolite's, spoken commentary on the "Verneinung (negation) of Freud" see *La Psychanalyse* (No. 1, 1956), p. 35, op.cit., pp. 211-212.

⁹ For information see 'Abbās Baghdādī, *L'ilā Nansā Baghdād fī al-'Ashrīnāt* (Beirut/Amman, al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr, 1999), pp. 38-40,88,96,128,144-145,196-198,205-207,298.

¹⁰ Hāshim's character could be considered as a rounded character as in the book of Seymour Chatman, op.cit., pp. 107-138.

or quickly and will only be achieved by bloodshed, which is the only thing that can revoke the dark sentence hanging over the nation.¹¹

Most of the important events take place in the streets of the city. In fact, the novel begins as Hāshim is driving through the streets of Baghdad. We are aware of his disorientation, as he cannot recognise the names of many of the long new roads through which he is driving: "I drove hastily through long roads, with which I am not familiar and ended up in a place where new buildings were being constructed."¹² Hāshim's car can be seen as a symbol for his life and the roads that he passes through in his car can be seen as a symbol of the "path of life."¹³ "The concreteness of this chronotope of the road permits *everyday life* to be realized within it. But this life is, so to speak, spread out along the edge of the road itself, and along the sideroads. The main protagonist and the major turning points of his life are to be found *outside everyday life*."¹⁴

The symbol of the car is so repetitive in the novel that it can be considered as a motif. Another motif might be the Tigris River, which divides Baghdad into two parts. Symbolically, it stands as a geographical witness to all the historic events and changes that are taking place in the country. It might also symbolise the resilience of the identity of the Iraqi people, which the regime tried to change by dominating their lives and effacing the ancient features of the capital under the pre-text of renewing them.

Baghdad has two facets in *Khātam al-Raml*, as the narrator reveals. The first aspect deals with the city as the space of his childhood, the second deals with it as the space of his coming to maturity.¹⁵ Through both of them, the narrator brings to the fore the disturbing changes that are taking place in the city, both political and social, which

¹¹ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., p. 154. My translation.

¹² Ibid., p. 6.

¹³ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 120.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 120-121.

¹⁵ In his discussion of Jane Austin's Britain, Moretti talks about "[t]wo Englands, where different narrative and axiological functions are literally 'attached' to different spaces: . . . and which one prevail?" Al-

affect the life of most of the people of Iraq. The geographical spaces here can be seen as an indication of the various contradictory ideas that fuse uneasily amongst the city's inhabitants.¹⁶ Al-Takarlı wants the reader "to *see and feel an idea*."¹⁷ He depicts the changes in a man who occupies a certain space and time in such a way that enables us to comprehend his feelings and their significance on a symbolic level. Space becomes time only in those novels that deal with the problems of internal borders, where it becomes possible to see or imagine time's journey through such space and how it affects human beings. This kind of literature is what can be called historical or realist literature. We realise by reading such novels that "movement in space is also, and in fact above all, . . . movement in *time* [itself]."¹⁸

The main subject of novels that deal with the internal borders of a country or a city is always political and the political aspect is usually lightly connected to the social aspect, as it is in *Khātām al-Raml*. Moreover, the nature of any space determines the nature of the characters in it. Moretti points out that a narrative that deals with the internal borders of a certain country or city requires serious characters that have an element of tragedy, because usually such spaces provoke conflict between them and the characters who live in them.¹⁹ The character of Hāshim is constructed on such a tragic persona, involved in a contentious relationship with his urban surroundings.

The city of Baghdad is like any other big, metropolitan city that brings together many contradictory aspects. According to Moretti, the narrative system that deals with the spatial organisation of the city "becomes complicated, unstable: the city turns into a gigantic roulette table, where helpers and antagonists mix in unpredictable combination,

Takarlı uses the old and new parts of Baghdad in a similar way; they stand for two competing ideologies. Franco Moretti, op.cit., p. 18-24.

¹⁶ For further discussion about how the geography of a certain place can bring out certain psychological traits in a character, see Franco Moretti, op.cit., p. 29-32.

¹⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., p. 149.

¹⁸ Franco Moretti, op.cit., p. 37.

¹⁹ See Franco Moretti, p. 43.

in a game that remains open for a very long time, and has many possible outcomes.”²⁰ Like the layout of a roulette table, the space of the city in *Khātam al-Raml* presents the protagonist with an array of options on which he gambles his fortunes and throws up chance events. However, it is not the randomness of fortune that al-Takarlī demonstrates through what the city’s behaviour exemplifies but rather the importance of people’s choice within it.

At this point we will discuss the Baghdad that the narrator knew in his childhood. Hāshim’s childhood in Baghdad was no better than his coming to maturity there. This is apparent from his description of his parents’ unhappy relationship with each other, which affected him so deeply as a child and which made him feel that he could never be safe and secure or capable of involving himself in normal life.²¹ However, this does not mean that he did not have any outlet or escape at that period of his life: he had the company of his mother in the old family house located in the old part of al-A‘zāmiyyah,²² where he learnt all he needed to know about the militant people to whom he belonged and where he shared with his mother and uncle their own dreams and aspirations.²³ A map can be drawn of Hāshim’s childhood in his own small world, located in the family house in al-A‘zāmiyyah, where he had complex experiences and feelings, due to his parents’ relationship, the relationship between his mother and uncle, and his own relationships with both his mother and his uncle. After his mother’s death, he became more attached to that part of Baghdad and to the old family house because it reminded him of his time in the company of his mother, which he never forgot.²⁴ That area of Baghdad containing the family’s first house formed the solid roots of Hāshim’s

²⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

²¹ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 20-21, 80, 86.

²² Ibid., pp. 50-51. Al-A‘zāmiyyah: is district located in the centre of one of Baghdad’s halves, al-Raṣāfah.

²³ Ibid., p. 40, 60.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 40, 60, 27, 51.

being, not only in Iraq but, also, in life.²⁵ The period of his life in this area also shaped his future life.

The house is a very important aspect of space that needs further study in fiction. Bachelard describes the house as:

"a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space, provided of course, that we take it in both its unity and its complexity, and endeavour to integrate all the special values in one fundamental value. For the house furnishes us dispersed images and a body of images at the same time . . . For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word."²⁶

The first time the old family house in al-A'zāmiyyah is mentioned is when Hāshim is visiting his uncle and remembers it in a series of flashbacks. Al-Takarlı's use of analepsis is often prompted by urban features, drawing together the deep connection between geography, memory and identity. The old house, with its balcony overlooking the river, is reminiscent of tender moments when he was warmly embraced by his mother and the crucial moments when he learnt about the militant past of his uncle from her. The character of the uncle embodies the idea of the militant history of the Iraqi people and represents the older generation of the city whose soul have been crushed:

"Once, years ago, . . . my mother, Sanā', and I were watching the sunset from the balcony of our radiant house that stood on the shore of the wide whispering river, when she saw him serenely strolling along. He was far away as if he was on the horizon. Yet she recognised him.

"That is your poor uncle, Ra'ūf. I would know him amongst thousands. It has been said that he was an undying flame. He frightened the government and the Ottoman Sultan with

²⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

his remonstrations in the army, so they set him up, then imprisoned him and tried to kill him with poison but he realised and saved his life by screaming for help and then hurling himself from a very high window into the sea. So he saved his life, as they say, but his soul was crushed, his flame extinguished. He returned to Baghdad, half sane and half mad, between a fully living being and a corpse which did not fully die.'

So, that is how he lived among his people and that is how I saw him as a child loving his diffidence and timidity, his anxiety and fear of the outside world."²⁷

In this house, he had his own corner where he always used to seek refuge from the chaotic, external universe. "The corner is a sort of half-box, part walls, part door . . . An imaginary room rises up around our bodies, which think that they are well hidden when we take refuge in a corner."²⁸ Such a refuge is exactly what he needed when his parents began to quarrel. It was also a safe haven in which he could enjoy the company of his mother at teatime.²⁹

The sequence of Hāshim's life in this house remains discernible through his stream of consciousness. He remembers the night of his mother's death, after a great quarrel between her and his father in their bedroom, marking the end of comfort and security in his life.³⁰ Nevertheless, that same house had, for a long time, fostered his sense of stability, especially at those moments when he used to have tea with his mother while enjoying the sunset on the balcony that looked out over the river:

"But the house was still there where it always was, with its wide, enchanted balcony, overlooking the horizon as it opened out across the river and upon the place where the sun

²⁷ *Khāṭam al-Raml*, op.cit., p. 18. My translation.

²⁸ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 137.

²⁹ *Khāṭam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 20,59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21,27.

sets. [In those days] we sat in silence, close to one another before the tranquil glass, taking in the vision of the majestic sun as it practised in splendour its daily ritual of occultation."³¹

Those moments can be equated with looking out over the horizon of life when the future appeared full of colour and hope.

The family house in *al-A'zāmiyyah*, which is depicted as an ancient and time-worn house,³² epitomises not only Hāshim's childhood security but his entire identity and the history of Iraq. This explains why he still feels attached to it, although he has already lost the feeling of security after the death of his mother.³³ The history of Iraq, especially its contemporary history, is full of conflict, death and sorrow. The house externalises Hāshim's personal experience of these events e.g. his parents' quarrels and his mother's death. The geographical location of the old house deepens the sense of fragmentation; a point which I will discuss later. The family house in *al-A'zāmiyyah* had been the cradle of dreams and aspirations despite all the frustration its dwellers were subject to, just as Iraq is known as the cradle of civilisation. The mother never stopped dreaming of seeing her son as an architect engineer, a telling symbol of Iraq's wish to rebuild and reconstruct itself through its faith in its children,³⁴ as emphasised through the characters of Sanā' and Hāshim in our reading of the two novels *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* and *Khātam al-Raml* respectively.

We are told that the house was sold more than ten years previous to the narrative time-span by Hāshim and his father - (who represents the group that supports the regime situation in Iraq, which is why he is unnamed) - to another Iraqi family.³⁵ This event took place in tune with the changes occurring in Baghdad, the family had a foreboding sense that the old house would soon collapse on their heads, an indication of their

³¹ Ibid., p. 21. My translation.

³² Ibid., pp. 31,49.

³³ Ibid., pp. 21,27,51.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

paranoia and loss of faith.³⁶ Yet, the continued existence of this house, despite having been sold to another Iraqi family, is fundamental to Hāshim's identity and thus, existence.³⁷ Hāshim says:

"As I stood there for a long time looking at the house, I kept thinking that it is surely absurd to contemplate the affinity between the earth and the joy and pain of humans. No matter how happy or how miserable people get, it will be useless to look at the earth beneath their feet for answers. My parents' bedroom! I have not been inside it for years. I managed to persuade Aunt Qādiriyyah to let us sleep in the living-room overlooking the river. I used to think that her long black hair had its marks printed on the floor - marks that could not be erased. I was utterly convinced that it would be profane to tread over that space where she collapsed for the last time. They carried her coffin through that door, lifted it up and down three times as a farewell to her family whom she had now departed . . . *This was my house, and the home was me. And as long as it stands there for me to see, I will keep on existing.*"³⁸

Bachelard speaks of such an attachment to the home of one's childhood, which is intensified in one's dreams, its imagery synonymous with emotional recollections:

"It is no longer in its positive aspects that the house is really 'lived', nor is it only in the passing hour that we recognize its benefits. An entire past comes to dwell in a new house. The old saying: 'we bring our *lairs* with us' has many variations. And the daydream deepens to the point where an immemorial domain opens up for the dreamer of a home beyond man's earliest memory. The house, like fire and water, will permit me . . . to recall flashes of daydreams that illuminate the synthesis of immemorial and recollected. In this remote region, memory and imagination remain associated, each one working for their mutual deepening. In the order of values, they both constitute a community of memory and image. Thus the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in

³⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 51-52. My translation.

the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original values as images.”³⁹

This is precisely what this house means to the protagonist. His memories of it provide a structure upon which to lean for support and windows through which to make sense of the world.

Hāshim's Uncle Ra'ūf's house in al-A'zāmiyyah is the second place that keeps him attached to his roots in the area, even after the sale of the old family house. It might also be said that this house contained something more than warmth, that it felt protective, like a shell. “Here [is] a man [who] wants to live in a shell. He wants the walls that protect him to be as smoothly polished and as firm as if his sensitive flesh had to come in direct contact with them. The shell confers a daydream of purely physical intimacy.”⁴⁰ Hāshim used to go to his uncle's house because it was a place that always reminded him of the past, his own personal past that related to the historical past of the city itself. He would go to this house to seek comfort and to dispel the tiredness caused by the hypocrisy and falsity of the social and political order that existed in the newly rebuilt part of Baghdad. But even this unique place where Hāshim could find himself, would not be left as it was for long: there is a looming threat of destruction ahead.⁴¹ This is augured by the imagined red spot on the window of Hāshim's uncle's house,⁴² which we sense is a symbol of the blood that his country will inevitably demand of Hāshim's generation.

³⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴¹ *Khātam al-Raml*, *op.cit.*, p. 13,18,47,52.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

We, also, can sense that the window, on which the red spot appears, symbolises the hope that the country seeks from its youth and that the alley that is connected to the al-A'zāmiyyah Corniche in the old part of this area, stands for the authenticity of the whole country that has to be saved from being distorted: "I glanced between the clouds and the dark walls, [suddenly there appeared] a red spot, luminous without reason, as if it were pointing to me from afar, as if it were greeting me shyly, as if it were . . . oh God, why should this be?"⁴³

In the second stage of the protagonist's life in newer areas of Baghdad we become aware that the seeds of his personality and future, that were formed in the previous period, are now developing and becoming embedded as he comes to maturity. At this stage, we see the many moral contradictions with which he comes into conflict in those areas of the city. The personality of the protagonist is being shaped through time between the two contradictory spaces of the same city.⁴⁴ Time spent in any space is bound to leave "a deep and irradicable mark on the man himself as well as on his entire life,"⁴⁵ and that is what happens in Hāshim's relationship with all the parts of Baghdad, in addition to the ongoing changes which are taking place throughout his life.

The family's new house in al-Hārthiyyah represents the new era and, especially, the new Baghdad.⁴⁶ It also represents the dislocation of the family as it finds itself obliged to change its traditional way of living and to adapt itself to a new encroaching modernity. Building a new city on the remnants of the old indicates the rising political power, which, by changing the features of the city, is rewriting its history. At the same time, the emerging city is taking away from the people the mode of life to which they are accustomed, as well as the rich history that belongs to them. The family's desertion of their old house in al-A'zāmiyyah, its physical distance, and the moral separation that

⁴³ Ibid., p. 13. My translation.

⁴⁴ See Franco Moretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 105-124.

⁴⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

⁴⁶ Al-Hārthiyyah is an area of Baghdad located in the side of the city called al-Karkh.

occurs between Hāshim and his uncle are illustrative of the fading harmony between past and present.⁴⁷ This is the reason why Hāshim can never feel any kind of intimacy towards the character-less and inhospitable new house in al-Hārthiyyah.

The huge iron gate locked by an iron chain depicts Hāshim's antipathy towards the new house.⁴⁸ It points to the insecure life lived by most of Hāshim's generation in Iraq, as a result of the ambiguous social and political changes that were taking place in the country without the approval or consent of the people. Moreover, even his bedroom, supposedly the most intimate and personal place for moral security, turns out to be cold and unfamiliar.⁴⁹ This feeling of unfamiliarity towards the whole of the new house, as well as his bedroom, is emphasised first when he wishes to draw a map of an intimate house for its dwellers and secondly when he, emphatically, describes it as being hollow.⁵⁰ Hāshim's feelings of mental discomfort with the encroaching political ideology are intensified through his description of physical discomfort and disorientation within the new house:

"I stepped into the hall of the first floor . . . my floor. I stood there, at the threshold eyeing the furniture. This is the reception room. Here I am now. Aunt Qādiriyyah's anecdotes are way beyond this moment in time! So now, as I look around this room, I see it differently. Its furniture was sombre and heavily engraved, but its fabric was white; it cost thousands; the curtains were blocking the horizon. Pangs of pain and fatigue were crawling now from the top of my head down towards my shoulders, my chest, my limbs and legs. How fatigued I am! I have been for ages; but this was not like any other fatigue. This time it was quite peculiar."⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Khātām al-Raml*, op.cit., p. 16. My translation.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27, 33. For an interesting discussion on the home not being a safe place, see Elaine Scarry, op.cit., p. 39.

⁵⁰ *Khātām al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 76,100,107-108.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

The soft, snug chair, which used to be in one of the corners of his bedroom, is the only place where Hāshim feels comfortable within this new house. It is the only place that allows him to reflect on his condition and everything that is happening to him and becomes the only place that can attach him to that strange, wearied world. This corner plays the role of preserving the balance and the equilibrium of his existence in an enormous, changing world - the new house - in which he was surviving, but to which he feels that he does not belong.⁵² It is the only corner that belongs to him in his new place and the new world; it is the "curve that warms [him]."⁵³ The image of Hāshim, sitting in his chair in the bedroom, listening to music and feeling secure in his corner, represents the human being's attachment to recreate a womb-like environment where he can prepare for any new phase that is to come. This is indicated by the protagonist's need to listen to music whenever he feels confused or needs to understand a particular situation more clearly or before taking any kind of action in respect to certain situations that he had to deal with.⁵⁴ This symbol is repeated so frequently in the novel that it can be considered as a motif.

All the other places in the house and the other parts of his floor and bedroom symbolise a state of alert for a confrontation between him and that part of the city. The windows of Hashim's floor and bedroom in the new house are always closed as if he were afraid of opening them, because the opening process points to the confrontation that he is trying to avoid between himself and the new world outside. This confrontation starts to take place after two pivotal events that happen to Hāshim. The first is when he has a misunderstanding with his uncle, after which he feels that he needs to make a spiritual connection with a higher power that can make him open himself up to the wider

⁵² Ibid., p. 33,38-39,74,82,90,113.

⁵³ Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., p. 144.

⁵⁴ For an interesting survey of the psychological and cultural significance of music, see Malcolm Bowie, "A Message from Kakania: Freud, Music, Criticism", *Cultural Theory* (Cambridge/Oxford, Polity Press, 1994), pp. 226-230.

universe.⁵⁵ The second event is when Hāshim's father comes to his floor to have a talk with him about the direction of his life; Hāshim does not agree with his father's attitude or point of view, which is symbolised by the chilly atmosphere.⁵⁶ The threshold of Hāshim's room - like the thresholds in al-Takarī's other novels - represents the threshold of the new world through which all important news and confrontations are processed and which aim at snatching Hāshim from his solitude.⁵⁷

The bathroom on Hāshim's floor also denotes the need for the human to return to purity, chastity and virtue. The latter qualities are hard for him to preserve against the deleterious changes that are engulfing the city. On the other hand, the bathroom is the place in which a human's weaknesses are exposed, as he fears he will be confronting his enemies outside. As we hear the protagonist saying: "the light was strong and white, reflecting off all the blue glassy objects in the bathroom, projecting a blazing glare of the type that pointlessly exhausts the gaze. To whom does the lonely human being implore for help?"⁵⁸ A later description of Hāshim's feelings in front of the bathroom's mirror are also a significant indication of his vulnerability and crisis of identity:

"Unintentionally, I entered the bathroom and stood, unmindful, in front of the mirror. I was dressed stylishly, in matchless attire, misty-eyed. I straightened my necktie and brushed the water from my hair and clothes. Then I froze, my arms drooping on either side like the features of my face. My reflection was coloured yet empty."⁵⁹

The only other part of the house that Hāshim finds comfort in, other than the chair in his bedroom, is on the balcony behind the kitchen - a place in which he can regain his strength and confidence whenever he feels weak - away from the spying eyes of the world that he loathed: "on the balcony behind the kitchen that overlooks a small garden

⁵⁵ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., p. 90.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36, 142-143.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 109, 145-146.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33. My translation.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101. My translation.

and a wall, I sit alone, trying to pull myself together and to renew my pledge from the depths of my soul."⁶⁰ It was another small shelter from a world in which he could find little comfort.

Just as he cannot adapt to the new house, he discovers that he cannot live a normal life in the society of Baghdad. The social morality that the ruling party is spreading, along with their new urban design is against the true nature of the Iraqi character, which the protagonist represents. This discovery takes place on the night of his wedding, when he discovers that he can only see sterility in the society of the period. This idea is emphasised by his deliberate seclusion, on his own floor on the night of his wedding. The bathroom's bright mirror helps crystallise the loss of a sense of belonging that he feels that night. It seems as if both time and space collude in fashioning a new stage in his life. He is obviously aware of his inability to fit in with Baghdad society or relate to his wife Amāl, who is clearly a representative of Iraq at that era. The clock's seven strokes symbolise Hāshim's resurrection.⁶¹ The act of abandoning his wedding party, which contains both surprise and suspense, is a kernel event without which the story would not give the same strong expression of the ideas that Hāshim represents. These ideas are accentuated through the opposite values represented by the house and its location. The contrast between the different values that the protagonist and the new house represent are emphasised when he also comes to terms with the definite fact that the new reconstructed Baghdad cannot be suitable to live in, due to it being a faithless and faked place. This also becomes clear in Hāshim's mind when he learns of the severe illness of his uncle and the break-down of Dr. Salmā.⁶² These two themes of information can be regarded as two satellite events that help the story to resolve its own plot leading to Hāshim's death.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 91. My translation.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 100-104.

⁶² Ibid., p. 148.

In the new parts of the capital, we notice the effort that the protagonist makes to integrate himself with the society and its lifestyle,⁶³ although, it results in painful failure. Hāshim's feeling of isolation is emphasised by his description of some of the new buildings and parts of the city that were being constructed on the remains of the original features by the ruling party,⁶⁴ as well as his description of the gloominess of nature in Baghdad.⁶⁵ In the modern novel, Bakhtin believed that:

"an individual's movement through space . . . lose[s] that abstract and technical character that [it] had in the Greek romance, where it was merely a mannered enchainment of co-ordinates both spatial (near/far) and temporal (at the *same* time/at *different* times). Space becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial: space is filled with real, living meaning, and forms a crucial relationship with the hero and his fate. This type of space so saturates this new chronotope that such events as meeting, separation, collision, escape and so forth take on a new and markedly more concrete *chronotopic* significance."⁶⁶

Hāshim's tragedy begins in places such as the al-Ulwiyyah Club. This club epitomises the Baghdad society that felt alien to Hāshim and which he rejects because of its lack of principles. Significantly, it is situated near the two most important symbols of the new political and social era. The first is the monument of the Unknown Soldier, which ironically, represents the opposite of glory. The statue symbolises all the futile sacrifices that the regime is forcing Iraq to make in its name, most historically through the First Gulf War, between Iraq and Iran. The second is the statue of 'Alī Bābā and the

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 22-25,34-37,54-57,66,96-104.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 6,13.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-13,16,59.

⁶⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 120.

Forty Thieves, which represents the political regime's exploitative treatment of the country.⁶⁷

Hāshim met his wife Amāl at al-Ulwiyyah Club while celebrating his success in a painting competition. He describes his feelings towards this society, which he confronts at that moment, by revealing to us his need for the support of some older women related to his father's family, who had refused to accompany him to the celebration. This indicates, of course, his need for the motherly emotions, which he misses. This also symbolises his need for security in such a society. All of these feelings are represented in Hāshim's wish to be covered with a fig leaf,⁶⁸ that indicates his feelings of embarrassment and shame when he began mixing with Baghdad society and which he, mistakenly, thought would renew his identity.⁶⁹

Eventually, a meeting is arranged between Hāshim, Amāl and Amāl's family at this same club. Her family insists that he should come to this meeting with one of his relatives, so he brings with him an older woman related to his father's family. At this meeting the behaviour of Amāl and her family reflects the society that they belong to, which is totally alien to Hāshim. He is shocked and upset by the social practices of Amāl and her family at the club - the way the father smoked a pipe, the way the mother showed off her jewellery and the makeup that Amāl herself wore, in addition to her flirtations towards him.⁷⁰ But although he was not comfortable with all what was taking place, he admired Amāl's personality and respected her family, which was a well-known family of Baghdad. This conflict of emotions makes him more and more confused; he cannot decide whether or not it is right for him to become involved in such society through this marriage. Amāl can be considered a product of the political regime and its

⁶⁷ *Khātam al-Ram*, op.cit., p. 6. For a discussion of literary portrayals of the city or country reshaped by the events that it witnesses, see Franco Moretti, op.cit., pp. 18-24, 40-57.

⁶⁸ *Khātam al-Ram*, op.cit., p. 37.

⁶⁹ Here, al-Takarlı is making an implicit reference to the following instances of the fig leaf in the Qur'ān: Q 95: 1, Q 7: 18-27, 62, 71-75. For further discussion, see: al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, pp. 152-153, 158-160, 597.

social facet. Hāshim cannot respect the regime, yet part of him desperately wants to be accepted in society. This may be the reason that made Hāshim's feelings towards Amāl become confused and ambivalent and the reason for his refusal to divorce her despite the fact that their marriage was not consummated.

On a visit to his uncle almost a year and a half after the wedding, Hāshim recognises the suffering that he had caused his uncle when he was introduced to the new Baghdad society on the occasion of Hāshim's wedding party. The uncle describes the panic that he felt because of being totally alone and neglected by the ruthless society he was introduced to.⁷¹ The company of others is a nightmare for Hāshim and Ra'ūf, and this inversion highlights the absurdity of the contemporary rules of social interaction. This point of view is emphasised by the setting of such a dramatic moment in such a public place (al-Ulwiyyah), in the presence of people from almost every class of society.

During this visit to his uncle, Hāshim avoids making a choice between his values and his desire to fit in by deliberately missing his appointment to meet Dr. Salmā, who wanted to discuss a divorce on behalf of Amāl.⁷² We later learn that he deliberately missed his appointment with her, which was to have taken place at the al-Ulwiyyah Club and instead preferred to meet his uncle.⁷³ This kind of narrative technique is called ellipsis. This technique is used here to emphasise the idea mentioned above of Hāshim's reluctance to undergo the confrontation that had to take place between himself and Baghdad society. This is demonstrated by his attitude towards Dr. Salmā and the club. Later, we learn of the original phone call in the office between Hāshim and Dr. Salmā and realise that he is slowly mentally preparing himself for the confrontation. Hāshim is

⁷⁰ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 35-39, 43-44.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-57.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45. For further information about how a person can merge between his private and public life, see Gaston Bahelard, op.cit., pp. 211-231.

⁷³ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 39, 60-62.

trying to take control over his life by expressing a desire to meet her that evening at the club, but he cannot quite muster the strength to see it through.⁷⁴

Hāshim's desire for confrontation between himself and the society grows until it is galvanised when he faces a strange question from the manager of the company. This question, which was supposed to expose the weakest spot in his personality, becomes a spur urging him to confront the society that he feels repulsed by, yet bound to. The society is represented very clearly by the club, therefore, he decides to lunch there on that very afternoon, for the first time since his wedding party debacle.⁷⁵

As we read *Khātām al-Raml* two events start to come together towards the end of the novel. One of them is in the past which passes through Hāshim's mind via his stream of consciousness and the other is in the present and is happening to Hāshim during the narrative time-span. The first event is what concerns us here, because it deals with the al-Ulwiyyah Club. On the night of his wedding, while on his way to his uncle's house, Hāshim suddenly decides that he would neither go to his uncle, nor return to the wedding party at the club. That night, Hāshim confronts his deep reservations and feels that he cannot go through with the marriage and become a part of that society. He decides to reject confrontation with the present order. This decision impels him never to return again to the club or to his wife.⁷⁶

Hāshim's description of his time at the house of Amāl's family in al-Manṣūr charts his increasing exposure to the decadence of Baghdad society. Through his stream of consciousness, Hāshim mentions two important realisations occurring in this place relating to his life. The first is his realisation on the day of his engagement to Amāl, that all that his father expected of him was to conform with the rest of the society out of

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 78-79. For further discussion about how a character develops by interacting with the different kinds of spaces in a city, especially the public spaces, according to the polyphonic and the carnival theories of Bakhtin, see: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 101-178 and M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 167-206.

fatherly love and his wish for Hāshim's protection and safety.⁷⁷ The second is when he suddenly discovers that his relationship with Amāl is weak and groundless because their values, as well as their backgrounds, differ:

"Another matter . . . another matter; that's how I go round and round before returning to my other affairs. Yes, it is one of many matters but it is precious, rare and difficult to grasp. I spoke to her a bit about him [Ra'ūf] in our unique rendezvous some days ago. It appeared to me that she had understood, then she turned her face and carried on talking to me about vapid and mundane matters. She is . . . how harsh she is! We were agitated, Amāl and I, amongst the tumult of our relatives and the cries of children and the joyous wailing of the women, so neither of us were able to put the engagement ring upon the finger of the other. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, [her cousin] appeared. She urged her cousin to thrust her finger into the ring!

This attitude, which upsets the natural course of events for the sake of forcing them to conform to its own artificial order, causes the pure golden ring to turn into *a ring of sand* and relationships to rot."⁷⁸

These two realisations (which he comes to terms with in a place that can be considered as an appendage to the new or rebuilt parts of Baghdad) make it clear to him that he cannot join that society in spite of the joy he derives from his father's happiness and his love for Amāl.

All these reasons lead Hāshim to abandon the populated world of Baghdad and seek solace as close as possible to the bosom of his mother, who is buried in one of the city's graveyards. According to Bakhtin's polyphonic and the carnival theory, setting scenes in spaces like the graveyard can often be a metaphor for the development that takes place in the idea that a certain character is represented by its interaction with a certain event

⁷⁶ *Khātām al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 97-104.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 91-90.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 93. My translation.

during a specific moment. The graveyard Hāshim visits is representative of the earth of Iraq, for whose sake people are prepared to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of a better future. Hāshim's love for the earth of his country prevents him from becoming involved with the new ideas of the dominant political and social power in the country. The new values conflict with the faith and beliefs of most of the people in Iraq, which are represented in this novel by the characters of the protagonist and his uncle. Hāshim's descriptions of the mosque near the graveyard and his mother's grave emphasise these beliefs and also give rise to the idea of God, the Creator of this world, being on the side of those people who are sacrificing themselves for the sake of keeping the earth of their country from being ruined. This idea is reinforced by the tall tree next to his mother's grave.⁷⁹ From its description, we may infer that it is the Sudrat al-Muntaha tree, or nabq tree, which is mentioned in the Qur'ān. The occurrence of this tree in al-Takarlī's novels always emphasises history and the religious significance of place in Iraq. Therefore, Hāshim's stumbling in the graveyard at that time can be seen as symbolic of two ideas. The first is the stumbling of the people of the protagonist's group, the majority in Iraq, as they search for salvation from the negative practices of the contemporary government and try to preserve their identity. The second can be understood as the stumbling of humanity in its search for salvation by seeking the Creator's mercy, which is represented by the grave of the protagonist's mother. Both meanings can be intertwined and merged in such a situation, because such events usually represent more than one simple straightforward idea; they reflect both the complexities of the living reality and its profound universal philosophy.⁸⁰

The rain in the novel, especially in the graveyard at this time, can be considered a motif. It symbolises the concealed storm of rage that exists in the heart of the oppressed people in Iraq. Although rain can be a symbol of fertility, in this novel, it appears to be a

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 102-103.

symbol for the opposite, the infertility and barrenness of the country at that period, which would not end until a storm of change takes place. This symbolic idea of fertility and infertility can be related to the ancient Sumerian and Babylonian myth of Tammūz.⁸¹

Hāshim tries to construct his own world inside the changing world of Baghdad by devoting himself to his work in architecture and civil engineering. This work inspires him with a sense of hope, because it gives him the chance to use his imagination, and influence the direction of the development in the city,⁸² as we hear the protagonist thinking to himself: "I had a desire to draw a simple healthy house; a home that provides a security and a sense of being loved. It can shelter you and it can open [its doors] to the world with you, if you want. I design it with a few strokes of my pen, before adding my final personal touches."⁸³ Even Hāshim's depiction of nature while he is working has that gleam of hope, because he is trying to preserve the authenticity of the city's geographical and historical features. He hopes that preservation of these features will give people a feeling of security and help to maintain their identities against forceful social conditioning.

The company of architects, in which Hāshim is a partner, is a symbol of the sources of authority, power and dominion. It indicates the centre of control and direction in Baghdad, which is the area in which the two parties are competing. This is why the company and his office in it is the only place in the new Baghdad where Hāshim feels comfortable. In his office at the company he feels that he has the ability to exercise a certain amount of control over the features of his country, an ability that he lacks in all other spheres. In his office he has the power to influence construction in Baghdad, because he owns shares in the company, which hints at the possibility that things could

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 102-103. For further discussion about nabq tree in Islam, see: Q: 33: 33-45, Q: 53: 14-18,28, and al-Sayyid 'Abdallāh Shubbar, op.cit., pp. 4422-424,526-527

⁸¹ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 25, 100-104. For further information on an ancient Mesopotamian myths, see: S.H.Hooke, op.cit., pp. 20-23,34-35,39-41; Georges Roux, op.cit., pp. 85-103; Eleazar M. Meletinsky, op.cit., pp. 196-200.

⁸² For the key instances of this, see *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 40-42,76,78-79,83-84,94-96.

be changed for the better if more people had a stake in their community.⁸⁴ Although at first he has to concede a little to the wishes of the manager of the company in deciding on the way of work, he is still considered as an opposing force. Therefore, the manager directs his hostility to Hāshim's principles by collaborating with the dominant political party.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Hāshim's skill and ownership of projects mean that the manager's will have limited power over him. Thus, at the beginning of the novel Hāshim's office is described as a place where he is able to feel hopeful of changing things for the better,⁸⁶ which gives him the strength to work very hard there.⁸⁷ This hope is also represented by the window in the office, which overlooks many beautiful sites in Baghdad: "I stood at the window on the fourth floor, watching over the areas of Baghdad surrounding me. Palm orchards stretched out in al-Jādiriyyah, the winding river around it, al-Jisr al-Mu'alaq, the streets and the clear sky."⁸⁸

The hope that Hāshim feels in his office is what inspires him to try to reconstruct his life by recalling his past through the stream of consciousness on which most of the novel is based. He is trying to identify the weaknesses in his personality that were caused by the events of his unhappy and insecure childhood that led him to make a lot of unnecessary mistakes. Hāshim wants to understand his inner self better, so that he can construct the future of his country and its people correctly with strong foundations. Again, the window of Hāshim's office symbolises the recollection of his past in order to survey himself and his life.⁸⁹ This idea is further developed through Hāshim's wish to draw a large map of the past in order to understand his own nation's history through the way time has affected geography within the borders of the capital city:

⁸³ Ibid., p.76. My translation.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 40,44,59,60,76.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 58-59,76,78-79,94,96.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 42. My translation.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 42-44,59-60,97.

"I set off for my office and began to gather the maps and put them in order. I don't like to be nostalgic. Perhaps I need to draw a map of the past to understand it. This would be something new; 'no one seriously considers undertaking such a project although it could be the beginning of plans for societal revolution; drawing the past, in order to know its influence in shaping the future. Simply because what has happened and what did not happen are the same thing; the difference between them is that which is concealed and that which is apparent. Like the iceberg.'"⁹⁰

This wish of Hāshim's is perhaps the clearest manifestation of the author's design in composing the trilogy. Hāshim sets out to reconnect, time and space, through his map, in order to understand his own identity. He believes this act will facilitate his aim of constructing a better future just as al-Takarlī connects time and space through the novel, building a foundation for cultural renewal.

Hāshim's efficacy of his work gives him confidence and prompts him to prepare for the confrontation about to take place between him and the forces that dominates the country.⁹¹ However, when the confrontation between Hāshim and the dominant political party does take place, we discover that it has always been much stronger than him. They have the power to constrain and reduce his powers in the company and to inhibit his architectural creativity. Even then, Hāshim remains calm, refuses to surrender and sticks to his principles, which surprises those opposing him.⁹² This situation reflects the feelings of the Iraqi nation for their government - an overarching theme al-Takarlī explores in this novel. The strong wind that blows against Hāshim's office window at the company and the gloomy horizon that it overlooks represent the destructive force sweeping across the country and the disappearance of hope for the Iraqi people, for as long as the same political power dominates them: "the horizon was filled with one large,

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 44. My translation. For further discussion on how geography can reshape the personality of a character and his cultural identity, see Franco Moretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-10, 29-32.

⁹¹ *Khātam al-Raml*, *op.cit.*, pp. 78-79, 83-84.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 110-111, 139, 148-151.

dark, irregular cloud, and the wind and the wooden frame of the open window were battering against one another. What is the use of all of this?"⁹³

The company clearly represents the idea of the centre of leadership. As an architectural company, it has both the power and the position to change the features of the city, just as the leadership - in this case, the Ba'th Party - has the power to change the country. The main source of conflict between the people and the government in Iraq is indicated by the manager of the company, who represents the interests of the government, and Hāshim, who represents the interests of his generation, and in fact the interests of most Iraqis throughout the contemporary history of their country. In *Khātam al-Raml*, Hāshim represents the continuation of his Uncle Ra'ūf's struggle. This explains their intimate relationship and the love of both of them for Sanā', who represents Iraq and their loyalty to her and to her memory.

Baghdad rejects the isolation of the protagonist and the conservative solutions that he is adopting, forcing him to confront and directly oppose the dangerous forces threatening the community, identity, and culture in the city. Hāshim knows he has to accept a confrontation in order to rescue the city to which he belongs from being defaced. So, he confronts his opponents who represent the ruling party in the country and refuses to give in to their conditions. He does this in a very firm way, which results in a clear oral threat against him.⁹⁴

All of this began in the al-Riwāq Exhibition Hall. The events of *Khātam al-Raml* take place in 1984, during the First Gulf War - (which began in 1980 and ended in 1988) - through the protagonist's stream of consciousness. The novel also encompasses the preceding period from the seventies onwards. This time span is very important in order to understand the nature of the al-Riwāq Hall and the important role that it plays in the novel. The novel begins with Hāshim's sudden decision to go to the al-Riwāq Hall while

⁹³ Ibid., pp.149.

he is driving through Baghdad,⁹⁵ which leads us to ask: why does Hāshim, who embodies the Iraqi people's objection to regime practices, suddenly decide to visit this state sponsored exhibition of paintings?

This opening event in *Khātam al-Raml* introduces the theme of confrontation between people and government in the country. It is a major event of the type termed 'kernel' events, which are those points in a work that give rise to change in the direction of the narrative.⁹⁶ As we have seen, random events that take place on the road are very important in al-Takarlī's novels and here, the road represents Hāshim's freedom, which is about to be curtailed. Hāshim's spontaneous decision to visit the hall causes him to coincidentally meet his wife's cousin, Dr. Salmā, who represents the interests of the government. Chance, as in all al-Takarlī's novels, has its own convincing logic that makes its existence at such a place and moment crucial to plot and a thematic statement. When Dr. Salmā hems Hāshim into a corner of a public space and forces him to confront her, that public place becomes a semi-public place, because the event is concentrated in a small corner of it at a certain moment.⁹⁷

The exhibition hall is a public hall, which the government built to epitomise the ideas of the Iraqi government, particularly since it is situated in one of the areas in Baghdad that had been almost entirely rebuilt. However, although the hall was reconstructed with the intention of attracting and controlling the intellectuals so that they would promote, expand and circulate government ideas through the fine arts, it did not succeed in accomplishing this aim. Instead, the hall became a place where intellectuals could express their rejection of the government's political practices,⁹⁸ such as the First Gulf War that was taking place at the time. Hāshim's sudden decision to visit the hall shows

⁹⁴ For the key instances of this, see: Ibid., pp. 8-11,17-18,37-39,61-73,113-133.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp.7-6.

⁹⁶ For further discussion about the novel's technique, see Seymour Chatman, op.cit., p. 53-59.

⁹⁷ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 7-12.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

his desire to join this group and become proactive in his political beliefs.⁹⁹ The sudden and unexpected appearance of Dr. Salmā in front of Hāshim at such a time and place,¹⁰⁰ is a portent of the looming confrontation he will eventually have to face if he takes this route in life.

Hāshim's progression of thought on his way to the hall is also significant. He remembers his mother's religious teachings as he is driving and the strange consolation that his Uncle Ra'ūf gave him at the time of her death, as he stops and gets out of the car. All these steps indicate that Hāshim is moving into a new phase in his life that has risen out of a latent desire, which must be satisfied in some way, even if this step leads to failure and frustration.¹⁰¹ It also explains the obscure joy and happiness that Hāshim feels when he enters the hall. Those of the Iraqi people who are represented by the protagonist are elated by the step that they are about to take for the sake of the nation's revival in Iraq, though they know it may not succeed.

When Hāshim describes the way he is squeezed into a corner of the hall by Dr. Salmā and the conversation that follows, we notice that the latter is determined to have a confrontation.¹⁰² Yet, it is also clear that Hāshim is not yet ready for such confrontation, although he is happy to stand up to her.¹⁰³ Undeveloped ideas in his mind force him to retreat from Dr. Salmā and walk out of the exhibition hall without responding to her conversation with him.¹⁰⁴ This feelings of impotence make him pretend that he was going to attack Dr. Salmā, which makes him angry.¹⁰⁵ The episode reveals the confusion and perplexity in which the oppressed part of the Iraqi nation exists. This is the main cause of the constant failure in their revolts against the negative actions of their own

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-12,17-18,36-38.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 6-8.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 8,10.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 10-11,17-18.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 10-11,18,37-38.

government. Hāshim's reaction to confrontation presents an explanation for the continued oppression in Iraq.

This dynamic element is reinforced by the second meeting between Hāshim and Dr. Salmā in the Baghdad hotel. The hotel was built in the early stages of the Ba'ṭh revolution, so it was a fairly old hotel, although it was still regarded as high-class. They meet in a wide hall on the first floor of the hotel, which was used as a waiting room. It is Dr. Salmā who chooses this meeting place, which suggests she feel at ease there.¹⁰⁶ Hāshim observes that the hall, that was previously narrow, has been widened, which can be understood as an allusion to the arbitrary power of the government.¹⁰⁷

Hāshim decides that he will be the one who chooses the place for the third meeting and decides on Aunt Hāshmiyyah's house in al-Darrāgh.¹⁰⁸ This indicates that he still cannot take effective action against the corrupt world unless he feels secure. This meeting comes to an abrupt end as soon as Dr. Salmā steps out of the door of the house. That moment marks the beginning of new stage of the conflict between the two parties.¹⁰⁹

The plot gathers pace when the protagonist loses the support of his best friend, his uncle. Their relationship comes to an end when Hāshim invited his uncle to lunch at the Fārūq Restaurant.¹¹⁰ According to Bakhtin's carnival theory, events that make a turning point in the hero's life always occur at thresholds or in public places and the significance of a moment can be equivalent to that of many years in the inner-self of the hero. The real-life chronotope is constituted by public places and the self-consciousness "of an individual and his life [is] first laid bare and shaped" in public places.¹¹¹ This

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 63-73.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 113-133. The quarter of al-Darrāgh is located in the area of al-Karkh in Baghdad, and it is considered to be one of the old quarters in the Iraqi capital.

¹⁰⁹ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 132-133.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 84-91, 92, 106, 113-134.

¹¹¹ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 131.

disagreement at the restaurant signifies the widening divisions between the people of the city, especially between those belonging to different generations.¹¹² The main reason for the division between the older and the younger generations in Iraq, according to the novel, was the difference in their experience, which leads to wildly differing points of view over how to respond to the national crisis.

The Fārūq Restaurant is another place located in the rebuilt part of Baghdad, therefore, it is regarded as a dubious place by people like Hāshim.¹¹³ It is run by a crooked manager who is happy when the place is full of people, regardless of whether some of them are suspicious of him. The mission of people such as the manager of this restaurant is to attract people like Hāshim and this is why Hāshim is annoyed with himself for feeling comfortable there. His predicament resonates with the wider problem of passive indifference to corrupt practices. He also intentionally chooses to sit in a corner of the restaurant, which indicates his refusal to involve himself with the society constituted by the ruling political party in the country. The protagonist also explains that people like him cannot avoid such places because they are spreading all over the city. The way that the protagonist depicts the restaurant highlights the capacity of such places to hide reality behind a variety of masks. This hypocrisy suggests why some people prefer to live on the periphery of society. He scolds himself when he starts to ironically compare what the political party in Iraq can offer to people like him, as opposed to what struggling patriots such as his uncle, who have tried to protect the country for all of their lives, can offer the people.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the protagonist's action in leaving the restaurant's false world represents his abandonment of the reconstructed world that surrounds him. This action may be considered as a symbolic one; Hāshim was able to

¹¹² For further discussion of how the architecture in parts of the city emphasis different social classes, see Franco Moretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 18-24, 79-86.

¹¹³ *Khātam al-Raml*, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

cut the one bond which had connected him to the socio-political reality - however unsatisfactorily.¹¹⁵

The uncle's speech during lunch centres on the fear that can lead people to be submissive, tyrannically oppressive, or deceitful. It hints at the possibility for the contemporary history of Iraq to be corrected by the protagonist's generation since it is they who possess the financial strength as well as hold positions of power in the country. Uncle Ra'ūf's speech to Hāshim can be considered as a plea for action to change the political and social situation in the country for the better. Ra'ūf tells his nephew to listen carefully to an intermediary from the other party such as Dr. Salmā, especially since what she says might happen. He stresses how essential it is that his nephew should carry on with his life and stop ruminating over the memory of his mother's death and blaming his father. He tries to persuade Hāshim that his father played a very limited role in causing the misery of his mother. In fact, the father was as much a victim as she was - the victim of his own weakness and limited thinking under the contemporary political logic of the country. The truth that the uncle wanted his nephew to accept about his mother, Sanā, was her weak physical and mental constitution, which caused her death at the age of thirty-one.

The weakness that caused the mother's death is representative of the period in which the country was very weak because of the successive political revolutions that took place within a short period of time. Indeed, Ra'ūf's advice, to Hāshim to put his mother's death behind him is really about the necessity of forgiveness and reconciliation in order to progress.¹¹⁶ However, Hāshim cannot bear to hear such advice in relation to his mother, which indicates that the right time for change had not yet come. The inappropriateness of the restaurant and the bad timing of the conversation causes the uncle to feel powerless. Hāshim later confesses that he might have listened to his uncle,

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 25,81.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 84-89.

if only he had had the patience and tolerance to accept the truth. This confession clearly shows Hāshim's awareness of his immaturity in not facing up to the facts of reality and thus, marks a development in his character.¹¹⁷

The old nabq tree, that Hāshim shelters under to protect himself from the rain, after he leaves the restaurant on his way to his family's new house, is a motif connecting space and time, history and geography. This tree is widespread in Iraq and has religious significance. In the Holy Book of Islam, it is said to be one of the heaven's trees known by the name of Sudrat al-Muntaha. Hāshim feels that this ancient tree is quivering under the raindrops, as if the raindrops were kissing it. The semi-sexual imagery and the association of the rainstorm with unleashing violent emotions fuses at this moment to suggest the catharsis that Iraq needs in order to overcome its barren cultural and political life and conceive a new consciousness among its people. The protagonist comments on how much he loves the smell of the wet earth after rain but not the rain itself:

"I was surprised by the heavy drops of rain soaking my face and my clothes as I pushed open the door of the restaurant, unaware of anything around me. I ran because I hate the rain, but I love the smell of the wet earth and the leaves of the trees. I stopped under an old nabq tree; it appeared to me as if it were shivering in pleasure from the amazing kisses of rain."¹¹⁸

This scene can also be understood as a prediction that fertility and rebirth in Iraq will not be achieved until the rage, which is suppressed, explodes.

The final time that Hāshim visits the Fārūq Restaurant, he discovers that he is isolated from the outside world more than even before and that the interior world of places located in the new rebuilt parts of Baghdad is exactly the same as the exterior. There is

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 88-89,91.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 25. My translation.

no solace or sanctuary to be found in this growing, modern sprawl, exactly as the government had planned.¹¹⁹

The warning that Hāshim receives from Dr. Salmā, in addition to the conversation that leads to the final separation between him and his uncle, results in the revelation of this hideous new face of Baghdad,¹²⁰ implying that the time for opposition is over.¹²¹ This idea deepens the feelings of estrangement that the protagonist has towards his own city.¹²² These feelings intensify when he is attacked and prohibited from completing his work in the company, then discovers that his movements are being observed by the ruling party.¹²³

The hospital that Hāshim enters after the first attack on him is symbolic of the way in which the current Iraqi government tries to justify its treatment of those who are against the policy it is pursuing, as if they were sick people in need of a cure. However, instead of leaving him as a shattered person as his opponents intended, Hāshim becomes more committed to his aim, than ever.¹²⁴

All these events, in addition, to the growing unsightliness of the city, give Hāshim the motivation to confront those who were destroying and defacing Baghdad and its history. This was the main purpose of his final meeting with Dr. Salmā. Hāshim's conviction at that meeting, which results in Dr. Salmā's retreat, means that he has reached a showdown with his opponents. Hāshim tries to fortify himself for this final confrontation by getting away from the crowded areas in the city and choosing to go to the suburbs, where the pure nature of the city had been left almost untainted. However, restricting his

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp.111-113. For further analysis of how the interior of a certain constructed places such as houses . . . etc, can reflect the exterior world of a certain city, see Gaston Bachelard, op.cit., pp. 211-231.

¹²⁰ For an interesting discussion about how can certain parts of a city can spread fear, see Franco Moretti, op.cit., pp. 101-105.

¹²¹ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., pp. 94-95.

¹²² Ibid., p. 6.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 98-106,109-111,139,149-152.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 104-107. On the use of social institution to spread government ideologies, see Elaine Scarry, op.cit., pp. 40-45.

movements to Baghdad suggests that any kind of reformation should begin there, before the other cities of the country. This decisive moment gives Hāshim the desire to be reborn, emphasised by the darkness of the night, which could be a symbol of the darkness of the womb and a desire to be reunited with the pure beauty of the city.¹²⁵

The major question that arises here is whether the protagonist of the novel is capable of stopping the growing hostility and antagonism of the contemporary city towards its own people, when he is so lacking in moral resolve as a result of growing up in such a negative atmosphere in Baghdad. The answer to this questions is, of course, no. At the end of *Khātam al-Raml*, Hāshim is killed on the road. As we have seen, the road is a chronotope of immense importance in al-Takarlī's novels.¹²⁶ Bakhtin says that the novel:

"fuses the course of an individual's life (at its major turning points) with his actual spatial course or road - that is, with his wanderings. Thus is realized the metaphor 'the path of life'. The path itself extends through familiar, native territory, in which there is nothing exotic, alien or strange. Thus a unique novelistic chronotope is created, one that has played an enormous role in the history of the genre . . . a road is almost never merely a road, but always suggests the whole, or a portion of, 'a path of life'. The choice of a real itinerary equals the choice of the 'path of life' . . . Road marks are indicators of his fate and so on."¹²⁷

The novel begins as the protagonist is driving on the road and ends there, which could indicate the floundering lives of vagrancy that the people were leading at that time. This reinforces the same idea that we find in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* in the death of Fu'ād and Midḥat on the road. This ending also suggests that the right time has not yet come for Baghdad to bring forth new life or even to reinvent its Tammūz. We are left believing that the feeble, fragile and ambiguous relationship will continue between the city and its

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp.134-137.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp.153-154.

¹²⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 120.

inhabitants who cherish a true, deep love for their tormented city.¹²⁸ The process of rebuilding the city by erasing its historical features will continue.¹²⁹ Hāshim's death is the way that Baghdad "starts to acknowledge the features of its own corruption,"¹³⁰ that is based on political violence.

Conclusion

At the end of *Khātam al-Raml*, Hāshim is not only passing between the two riverbanks of Baghdad, but is also passing between the old and the new parts of that area of the city, as if he were trying to regain the historical authenticity (time) of the city (the geographical space) by re-connecting them, on the assumption that in doing so, Baghdad would regain its soul. Again, we perceive the idea that disunity is preventing national revival: the two halves of the city should be joined together to add up to a complete harmonious whole.

In *Khātam al-Raml*, al-Takarlı concentrates on Baghdad only. He does it in a way that makes us feel as if we were discovering alone the amount of changes that took place in the city since the sixties, in other words since *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, without any interference from him, in via impressive literary techniques.

The big nuclear Baghdadi family had fragmented and the warmth in the relation between its members had demolished, this step began in the end of *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* between the members of 'Abd al-Razzāq's family and materialised in *Khātam al-Raml* between the members of Hāshim's family. This is noticed clearly from the type of relation that the mother Sanā' had with her husband and the relation that Hāshim had with his father. The Ba'th Party succeeded in tearing apart the familial relationships in that city by enlisting loyalty the of some of the members in those families towards it.

¹²⁸ *Khātam al-Raml*, op.cit., p. 93.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

Such was the case in Hāshim's father in this novel and in the case of 'Adnān and Ḥusayn in the previous chapter. It also succeeded in sowing suspicion and mistrust between the people of that city, which is noticed clearly from the relation that the protagonist had with the manager of Fārūq's Restaurant and with his manager in the company that he worked in.

In this novel we also notice that the Ba'th Party succeeded in uprooting people from their environment. This is manifested in the protagonist's relation with his old house and his uncle's house in one of the old quarters of al-A'zamiyyah in Baghdad, and with his new house in one of the renewed areas in al-Ḥarithiyyah. The Party also succeeded in reforming the architectural features of the city in a way that matched their political and social view, without taking into consideration the suitability of such changes to the essence of the cultural character of Baghdad and of the Iraqi personality. This again is pictured clearly through Hāshim's relation with his new house, his relation with places such as Fārūk Restaurant and his feelings of discomfort towards the new streets and monuments that are built by the Ba'th Party in Baghdad.

Khātām al-Raml portrays the huge amount of political, social and cultural deformation that happened in Baghdad by portraying the extent of laceration and contradictions that Hāshim was subjected to and which made him unable to come to terms with the destructiveness that was taking over the city. In this novel the writer concentrates on the ancient capital to show his readers the amount of the huge and quick succession that the Ba'th Party achieved in a short time since it ruled the country from the sixties until the mid-eighties, including the wreckage caused by the Iraq-Iran War.

Khātām al-Raml emphasises on the ideas of deformation and destructiveness that were brought about by the Ba'th Party by the end of *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* and by showing the negative effect of such values on the psychology of the ordinary Iraqi personality in

¹³⁰ Vincenzo Ruggiero, op.cit., p. 183.

particular, and the city of Baghdad in general. The writer did that in a time-span when the ruling party, as this novel shows, established itself very well.

Chapter 3:

Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'

Synopsis of *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*

Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā' is al-Takarlī's third novel, and was first published in 1998.¹ Its historie or fabula tells of the misfortunes of a man called Tawfīq, who belongs to the intellectual middle class of Iraqi society. The causes of his misfortunes are his mother's discrimination between him and his elder brother who she prefers, and the implemented ill-conceived social transformations by every regime that takes control of the country during the period covered by the novel. The experience of the whole of Iraq, but particularly of the people of Baghdad is revealed allegorically through Tawfīq's relationship with the members of his immediate and extended family. Tawfīq's close family consists of: the father, Sūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mawlā; his wife; and Tawfīq's brother, 'Abd al-Bārī. Tawfīq is the protagonist of the novel, and all the other characters revolve around him. His interaction with the other characters allows the reader to appreciate the overall state of the country at that time, as well as to understand the individual development of Tawfīq's character. The author reveals Tawfīq's hidden life through the five main aspects of human life: birth, food, sleep, love and death.² The development of his character is related to Iraq's ancient history at the beginning of the novel and then to the contemporary history of the rest of the Arab countries. This allows us to get to know Tawfīq as a fully rounded character, and to understand modern Iraq in its historical and political context.

¹ The novel was written in 1996, and has 464 pages. Pages 465-467 contain statements and opinions about life by famous intellectuals.

² For further discussion of these aspects, see E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London, Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 55-63.

The novel briefly covers the period prior to 1914, but its main events occur between 1914 and 1981. The story is set in three parts of the country: Khanaqin,³ Baghdad, and the northern parts of Iraq, and is divided into four, untitled chapters. The English translation of the title, as written inside the cover of the Arabic edition, is *Gladness and Pains*, although I think that a better translation would be *Pleasures and Sorrows*. Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ emphasises that this novel should be considered as one of the most important novels in Arabic literature in particular, and world literature in general, because it reflects both the ancient and the contemporary history of Iraq, together with that of the whole Arab region.⁴ It achieves this through discussing complex political and social phases by means of the turbulent events experienced by Tawfiq and his family - events that are loaded with sorrows, yet made bearable by the minimal pleasures, across which the character's occasionally stumble. Ḥāfiẓ argues that the title of the novel is actually reflective of Arab reality in which, despite frustrations and defeats, glimmers of hope are still visible.

The novel uses allegory - a mixture between representational and illustrative methods - for establishing a connection between the real world and its reflection in the novel's own fictional world. However, in analysing this type of narrative method, it is essential that the reader has some prior knowledge of the historical background of the subject dealt with, as this knowledge is the key to understanding and interpreting the work of art.⁵ "[T]he novel is a mode of communication,"⁶ whose codes have to be interpreted in order to completely understand the messages contained in it.⁷ This study should attempt to decode the novel with reference to its historical, geographical and political context.

³ Khanaqin is a city located to the east of Baghdad. It is an important southern city near the Iraq-Iran border.

⁴ See Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Riwayāt al-Takarīf al-jadīdah 'al-Masarrāt wal-Awājā': Riwayāh Kubrah bi-ḥaqq Tujassad Masirat al-'Irāq ma'a al-Taḥdīth", 1/2, *Al-'Arab*, edition no. 10 (London, 1-12-1998), pp. 14-15.

⁵ For further discussion, see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London/Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 82-105.

⁶ David Lodge, *The Practice of Writing* (New York, Penguin Books, 1997), p. 180.

⁷ See also Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, (trans.) Stephen Heath (London, Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 32-33.

We should bear in mind that al-Takarī's allegorical, imaginative world in *al-Massarāt wal-Awjā'* is somewhat more cohesive than the reality of Iraq. Iraq has not been a very integrated country during its recent history because of the great, engineered, divides between the South, Centre and North.⁸

This is al-Takarī's most ambitious novel to date, showing how the political disturbances that Iraq has suffered have affected society and accentuated the negative aspects of its culture, leading to an increase in the dislocation in people's lives. The cities in this novel and the different locations within them are a perfect arena for playing out the intense political and social conflicts that take place throughout the country, and the constant sense of imminent explosion due to these conflicts.⁹ "[S]pace . . . becomes the blind spot in a . . . political technology. This is the way in which the concept-city functions; a place of transformations and appropriations, the object of various kinds of interference but also a subject that is constantly enriched by new attributes, it is simultaneously the machinery and the hero of modernity."¹⁰ In al-Takarī's novels, the city is a victimised hero, one that offers hope of sanctuary and civilisation, but one that is both decaying and being remodelled with increasingly oppressive effects. The novel is considered to be the most suitable genre for these sorts of ideas, which portray and express all kinds of unique human experiences, because it is the "logical literary vehicle of a culture."¹¹

The analysis will illuminate the interaction of the protagonist with place, as manifested in three features of the novel:

⁸ For an analysis of the Arabic novel's description of the reality of the Arab world, see Umnā al-ʿId, *Fann al-Riwāyah al-ʿArabiyyah: Bayna Khṣūṣiyat al-Hikāyah wa Tamayyuz al-Khiṭāb* (Beirut, Dār al-ʿAdāb, 1998), pp. 93-96, 111.

⁹ The map of social conflict is described further: Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (England/U.S.A., Blackwell, 2000), pp. 34-43, 51-64 and Ḥasan Bahrāwī, *Bunyat al-Shakl al-Riwāʿī: al-Faḍāʾ al-Zaman al-Shakhsīyyah* (Beirut, al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1990), p. 25-37.

¹⁰ Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon During (ed.) (London/New York, Routledge, 1999), p. 155.

¹¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London/Pimlico, 2000), p. 13.

1- The places with which the character interacts in Khanaqin and Baghdad, such as: huts, houses; his school; the College of Law; the Ministry; the Urūzdi store; al-Afrāh markets; cafés; the government electricity company; al-Sharq Hotel; hospitals; the physician's clinic; the Baghdad night-club; the police station; bookshops; the cell in which Tawfiq is beaten, the restaurant which Tawfiq visits with Ghassān; the Darrāgh mosque; the bakery in al-Mrabba'ah district; a small restaurant in al-Mrabba'ah district; a bar in the al-Sīnk district; the public bath in the al-Mrabba'ah district.

2- The relationship of the character with the different parts of Iraq: Khanaqin, Baghdad, al-Suwayrah,¹² Kirkuk,¹³ Baqubah and the distant lands of North Iraq.

3- The meaning of symbols widely used throughout the novel and their relationship with the aspects of space such as: Tawfiq's diary; his dreams about Adele, Anwār and all kinds of death and destruction; Adele's lock of hair in a blue envelope; Fathiyyah's old box; the mirror; the rain; the Tigris River.

These three points will be discussed simultaneously, as in the previous chapters and the three of them will be discussed with particular reference to each character's representation of a certain area or section in Iraq, and how their movement and interaction relates to contemporary history.

Analysis of the Novel

The events of the novel reflect the three main areas of Iraq, the Shi'ite South, the Sunni Centre and the Kurdish North, but they mainly take place in cities. The modern novel has a complex relationship with the city, "[c]ities have so strongly suggested particular imagery and themes, and so shaped the attitudes and feelings revealed in many great novels, plays and poems, that the very existence of these works of literature depends on

¹² A suburb of Wasit, a city to the south of Baghdad near the border of the southern part of the country.

¹³ A city in the north of Iraq.

the existence of the city.”¹⁴ Because of the political, ethnic and historic nature of Baghdad, Khanaqin and the northern parts of Iraq, form a rich thematic source in al-Takarlı’s third novel. The main characters’ interaction with these cities is political loaded with seemingly minor events able to symbolise or comment on major political issues.

The novel begins in Darbūnat al-Shawādy, the Alley of the Monkeys, a small quarter in the city of Khanaqin, where a newcomer appears. His name is ‘Abd al-Mawlā, and he is described as having the features of a monkey and a strange accent. We are told that no one knew his real origins; he lived alone in an isolated and remote area of the quarter, and worked hard as a carpenter, later marrying the daughter of a carpenter in the quarter and having eight sons, all of whom he trained to be carpenters.¹⁵ Darbūnat al-Shawādy began to assume its final features at the beginning of the twentieth century, shortly after ‘Abd al-Mawlā’s family established itself there.¹⁶

From the first few pages of the novel it is clear that its events originate before the beginning of the twentieth century. The author describes the features of ‘Abd al-Mawlā, his sons and grandsons rather as one would a pre-historic human being, which is further stressed by ‘Abd al-Mawlā’s strange accent, his unknown origins, the name of the alley where the family lives and the family profession - carpentry - one of the earliest professions known to mankind.¹⁷ By making ‘Abd al-Mawlā appear like a throw-back to the Sumerian era, al-Takarlı, implies that the ordinary people of Iraq have not changed for centuries and that there is a huge gulf between them and the more sophisticated people in the cities. In drawing attention to the Sumerian civilisation, the first known civilisation in the country, discovered by nineteenth century archaeologists in the

¹⁴ Michael C. Jaye/Ann Chalmers Watts (eds.), *Literature and the Urban Experience: Essay on the City and Literature* (New Brunswick/New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1981), p. ix.

¹⁵ Fu’ād al-Takarlı, *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā’* (Damascus, Dār al-Madā, 1998), pp. 5-7.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-104. For further discussion, see Şabrî Hāfiz, “Riwāyat al-Takarlı al-Jadīdah ‘al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā’”: Riwāyah Kubrah bi-ḥaqq Tujassad Masīrat al-‘Irāq ma’a al-Taḥdīth”, op.cit., pp. 14-15.

Southern parts of Iraq,¹⁸ al-Takarlī wants his readers to interpret the novel as a broad historical perspective to enable them to understand the scale of the tragedy that has befallen the people of his country. To encourage this interpretation, it is likely that he consciously chose a time and place for the beginning of the novel.¹⁹

One of 'Abd al-Mawlā's sons, Sūr al-Dīn decides to marry the daughter of a retired customs officer, whose only condition is that he should build a house in the middle of Khanaqin, near to her father's house, and away from his own family in Darbūnat al-Shawādy. This was before the First World War and the marriage does not take place until the year 1917, after Sūr al-Dīn has built the house where he is to live with his wife. Sūr al-Dīn borrows money from his father and promises to repay it in instalments.²⁰ The couple have their first son - 'Abd al Bārī - after eight years of marriage, at the time of the establishment of the Iraqi kingdom in 1925. 'Abd al-Bārī has exactly the same features as his father and his father's family, but both he and his father are isolated from their family in Darbūnat al-Shawādy.²¹ The father-in-law then suddenly decides that his daughter, her husband and child should go to live in Baghdad in a quarter called al-Ḥaydar Khānah, with his widowed sister who had been living alone in a large house.²² There is a movement of time and space in the novel: space is expanded from Darbūnat al-Shawādy in Khanaqin to the centre of the city itself, then to Baghdad, where the contemporary history of the country is being shaped. With the expansion of space, time also expands from the Sumerian era until 1931,²³ and becomes linked to specific events. Despite this long expansion of place and time, we notice that the way ordinary people live their lives and the way they look has not changed very much.

¹⁸ See Georges Roux, *op.cit.*, pp. 66-84.

¹⁹ The importance of the beginning in any work of narrative is elaborated in, see Edward W. Said, *Beginnings, Intention and Method* (London, Granta Books, 1997), p. 19.

²⁰ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, *op.cit.*, pp. 8-11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11-12,35.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 12-16.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Sūr al-Dīn sells his house and his carpentry shop in Khanaqin and goes with his wife and son to live in Baghdad. His wife becomes a teacher at an elementary school and he opens a carpentry shop, as his father-in-law had planned.²⁴ The map of Sūr al-Dīn's life changes as the contemporary history of Iraq is being made. He moves from a hut in Darbūnat al-Shawādy to a large house in the centre of Khanaqin city, then moved with his family to a large old house in the quarter of Ḥaydar Khānah in Baghdad, as if he, as the extension or the descendant of the first human being in Iraq, was following the progress of the new world that is being formed there. He also represents the growing ambition of man in abandoning the simple world of Darbūnat al-Shawādy and Khanaqin for the affluent streets of Baghdad, where he could make a name for himself as a famous carpenter.

A year after settling in Baghdad Sūr al-Dīn's wife gives birth to Tawfiq, who is different from all the members of his father's family, including his elder brother. He has beautiful features and as the years go by, he shows intelligence beyond that of his elder brother. All the family are happy to have a child like him. After the death of his father, Sūr al-Dīn discovers that he has not inherited anything worth mentioning, so Baghdad offers him a new start and an opportunity to fulfil his dreams.²⁵ Baghdad, after initially rejecting the family of Sūr al-Dīn, begins to assimilate them. The attitude of the city to newcomers is symbolised by the treatment of Sūr al-Dīn's family by the aunt,²⁶ who does not accept them until they begin to put down roots and adopt the more sophisticated manners of the capital, symbolised by the birth and features of Tawfiq.

The text of this novel is carefully structured by the author, synchronising the lives of the characters with the social and historical events of the period it deals with. Tawfiq's maternal grandfather dies in 1939, at the time of the murder of King Ghāzī and in 1942, during the Second World War, one of Sūr al-Dīn's brothers in Khanaqin, Sayf al-Dīn, -

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 10-16, 19.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

who represents part of the corruption of the Iraqi nation - is murdered. His murder was a result of his attempt to resist the western intervention into his country, albeit through perverse means.²⁷ During all these tumultuous events, Sūr al-Dīn's wife is trying to reunite her family and to gather them around her. She also begins to direct her family's life after the death of her father, and the way in which she does this indicates that her character represents Iraq itself during that period. The author, who during this part of the novel is an external covert narrator,²⁸ does not give Tawfiq's mother any name or attribute to her any kind of physical quality. Here, al-Takarlī cares more about the conception of the world that the character represents. According to Lukács, this concept of the world is a "profound personal experience and the most distinctive expression of [the character's] inner life; at the same time it provides a significant reflection of the general problems of [his/her] time."²⁹

These events focus on the relationship between the Centre and the Southern part of the country. The Southern part of the country becomes, as it were, the origin of the history of the entire country, which is emphasised by the emigration of Sūr al-Dīn to Baghdad, and then the death of his brother in al-Ahrāsh.³⁰ The events that take place in this space begin to leave their traces on the lives of ordinary people. They live and die according to external events; even chance has to have certain significance.

Tawfiq, whose character symbolises the positive elements in the Iraqi nation, was growing up during the Second World War when Allied Forces occupied Iraq, Palestine was divided and demonstrations took place against the Port Smith agreement between the years 1947-1948.³¹ Although those events did not affect his family financially, he enthusiastically participated in the demonstrations against the western policies that led to

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 16-19.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 9,19-21.

²⁸ For further discussion, see Seymour Chatman, op.cit., pp. 146-158.

²⁹ George Lukács, *Writer and Critic and other Essays*, op.cit. p. 151.

³⁰ Al-Ahrāsh: refers to the areas of desert located in the southern and central parts of Iraq.

³¹ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 21-22.

the fragmentation of the Arab Nation at that time.³² Tawfiq's actions could symbolise the shared responsibility that Iraqis felt, at that time, towards the whole Arab Nation. This period resulted in the thriving of a new materialistic social class, represented in the novel by the family of Sulymān al-Qaṣṣābī, a neighbour in Baghdad, who impinged upon the lives of Sūr al-Dīn's family.³³ It also resulted in the flourishing of corruption and prostitution in this climate.³⁴ In other words, Iraq - like many of the neighbouring Arab countries - was a victim of the tumultuous political events that were to have a hugely negative effect on the lives of the Arab peoples over the twentieth century.³⁵

A breach began to develop between the urban life that Sūr al-Dīn's family had become accustomed to in Baghdad and the simple productive life based on feudalism, which was common in Darbūnat al-Shawādy. The family adapted to the complex life of the city with all its class struggles, which were based on industrialisation and bureaucratic projects.³⁶ This led to Sūr al-Dīn's rejection of his own people and the antipathy of Khanaqin to Tawfiq, as he becomes politically conscious.³⁷ Tawfiq is different from most of his family - (his nation) - not only in how he looks, but also in his awareness of the political issues that are affecting Iraq as part of the wider Arab Nation. He is a highly educated intellectual, which sets him apart from most of his generation.

Tawfiq passes his high school examination and then enters the College of Law in 1951, the year of the death of his mother's widowed aunt who had always adored him.³⁸ During 1952, government policy in Iraq was erratic, which had a negative impact on social life in Baghdad. This makes Tawfiq and the politically aware members of his generation pessimistic, in spite of what had been achieved in the Egyptian revolution of

³² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

³³ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 25-26, 28, 39-40.

³⁵ For further discussion, see Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Riwayāt al-Takarī al-Jadīdah 'al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā': Riwayāh Kubrah bi-ḥaqq Tujassad Masīrat al-'Irāq ma'a al-Taḥdīth", op.cit., pp. 14-15.

³⁶ On the development of the city: culturally, socially, economically and politically, see Henri Lefebvre, op.cit., pp. 118-121.

³⁷ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 26-27.

1952. The emergence of a social class that believes solely in material gains - to which al-Qaṣṣābī's family belong to - encourages Tawfīq and others to turn away from everything other than tawdry amusement and night clubs. During this period he meets his first and true love, Adele, but is not able to maintain his relationship with her. Difficulties also begin to build up in his relationship with his mother because of his dissipated life.³⁹ In 1953-1954, 'Abd al-Bārī marries Thurayyā, the divorced elder daughter of al-Qaṣṣābī;⁴⁰ and Tawfīq passes the final examinations of his fourth year at Law College and obtains employment in one of the government ministries. During this time, Tawfīq feels harrassed by Kamīlah, al-Qaṣṣābī's younger daughter who makes it clear that she wants to marry him.⁴¹ The government buys the houses of both Sūr al-Dīn and al-Qaṣṣābī families, paying considerably more than they are worth, but the two families again find them-selves living close to each other in al-Karkh,⁴² near the al-Darrāgh farms at a place called al-Ḥay al-'Arabī.⁴³ The reformation and rebuilding of the ancient parts of Baghdad by the government make it possible for the materialistic class to become richer.⁴⁴

Tawfīq, can be seen as emblematic of positive development in Iraq, as a modern independent nation. His struggle and need for support implies the dependence of development on strong foundations; on an empathy with the past. This explains the strong attachment between the protagonist and his mother's aunt and his attachment to her house, since the aunt and her house represent the old part of the city of Baghdad and its history.⁴⁵ During the new phase, into which the city was entering, Tawfīq loses a huge part of his cultural and civil heritage, and thus loses his sense of security by the death of

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 28-30.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 30-34, 41, 45.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 23-24, 29-32, 35, 37.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 24, 36-39, 41-44.

⁴² When the city was built, it was divided by the river Tigris into two halves - one was called al-Raṣāfah and the other al-Karkh.

⁴³ *Al Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 31, 41-44.

⁴⁴ Of this phenomenon, see Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Riwayāt al-Takarī al-Jadīdah 'al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'": Riwayāh Kubrah bi-ḥaqq Tujassad Masīrat al-'Irāq ma'a al-Taḥdīth", op.cit., pp. 14-15.

his mother's aunt and the sale of her house.⁴⁶ He is also deeply affected by the deterioration of his relationship with his mother, who represents a phase of Iraq's history, because of her association with this class. His refusal to emulate his mother in her association with the profiteer class causes their relationship to become more distant. When Tawfiq's father dies in 1955, he discovers that he has not inherited anything from him and begins to devote more of his time to the diversions of Baghdad's nightlife. The carpentry shop goes to his brother and his mother is evasive when he asks her about the money that she was instructed to give him by his father.⁴⁷

The unstable political situation of Iraq, and of the Middle East in general, during 1956 makes life miserable for people highly aware, like Tawfiq, who cared but could not do anything positive. The only event that rouses the protagonist and his friends from their immersion in clubs and bars is 'Abd al-Karīm Qāsim's revolution of 1958.⁴⁸ At this time, 'Abd al-Bārī is progressing in both his career and family life. He has a happy marriage that produces five children, two daughters and three sons,⁴⁹ and a strong relationship with his mother. The brothers not only have different features, but also different ways of life. Part of Iraq at that time, represented by Sūr al-Dīn's wife, prefers a subservient character like 'Abd al-Bārī, who is easily accepted into the opportunist society represented by the al-Qaṣṣābī family. The ideology that was rapidly changing life in Iraq wants to, only, preserve from the past what suits its agenda, rejecting everything else. The primitivism represented by the character of 'Abd al-Bārī is accepted, and the new, educated generation represented by Tawfiq is marginalised, because they represent a threat to that ideology.

At the end of 1959, Tawfiq once again meets his love Adele, who is working at al-Rāfidayn Bank, but she has been married for two years to a prominent businessman

⁴⁵ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 29,41,44-45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 45,47,65-66.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

called Salīm Marwān and has a daughter called Zina. They arrange that he would call her on a fixed day each week during her working hours at the bank, but at different times. The first time they meet during the day is at a café in the Urūzdi Bāk building. Then they began meeting at the house of one of her friends, which is located in the al-Zawiyah quarter. Their first meeting in that house is a very important event that is filled with the atmosphere of the rising tension between them. She reads the dregs of a coffee cup for him and tells him that something had been stolen from him for a very long time:

“She held his cup with her manicured fingers and said:

-Do not ever underestimate the power of the symbols in your cup of coffee. They are of supreme importance. You have been cheated and you are not even aware by whom. It is such a strange world! How could the likes of you be cheated? See how clear this symbol is, and that feathered arrow. You are very ill-fated . . . but how could this happen?

He told her that it must be the symbols that were wrong. She was still looking into the mysterious shapes inside his cup of coffee, and then smiled approvingly and assured him that readings could sometimes be misleading.”⁵⁰

This kind of event is significant because it links past to future and points back to Tawfiq’s lost inheritance. Tawfiq’s relationship with Adele develops, and they continue to see each other in that house and at poker parties. Their relationship is a complete and a deep one, spiritually and sexually; in fact the sexual relationship between them is depicted as a symbol of their spiritual union. Adele loves him because she sees his inner beauty. She is much stronger than him and it is she who seeks the relationship, not fearing the opinion of others or the traditions of society. As we hear her saying to Tawfiq: “- And I am your other half, I am your wife, I chose you and not him. This is

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 48,55-56,60,73. My translation.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

my opinion, and I do not care if no one believes me, I have crazy ideas and I take notice of them.”⁵¹

The first time Adele and Tawfiq meet is in daylight and in a public place. It is as if Adele wants to challenge the distorted life that they were living in Baghdad. Tawfiq understands Adele's personality precisely, as indicated by his gift to her from the Urūzdi store. In her bold and strong character, Adele represents the modern side of Baghdad that is trying to exist without artifice. In her relationship with Tawfiq, she is trying to reach for the pure and original inner beauty that she senses in the intellectually and morally developed sections of Iraqi society. Their love and sexual relationship, therefore, can be understood as an attempt to unite the good and strong people of Iraq with the alienated intellectuals, who are capable of leading the latter to a better life.⁵² Their relationship continues until the revolution of ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Arīf in 1963, when Adele's husband, who belonged to the materialistic social group is captured and dies under interrogation. Even the character of Adele, who represents the revolt of modern Baghdad, cannot shake off the strong grip of corruption, and is possessed by it herself. She stays in Iraq for a year after the death of her husband but then decides to leave for France. She promises Tawfiq that she will write to him and that he can come to live with her once she has settled down. Tawfiq cannot stop thinking about her, and although he does not receive any letters from her, he always remembers her, and finds a kind of satisfaction in hearing about her from others.

Not only did the successive revolutionary regimes produce materialistic people like Adele's husband, Tawfiq's family, and al-Qaṣṣābī's family, but they also produced a frivolous generation consisting of those like Tawfiq and his poker-playing friends.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 60. My translation.

⁵² For further discussion about the way that an idea represented by a certain character is developed through the sexual act in the novel, see: Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, op.cit., pp. 78-178; M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 167-206, 247; Stephan Guth, "The Function of Sexual Passages in some Egyptian Novels of the 1980s" in R. Allen et. al. (eds.), p. 123.

⁵³ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 76-77, 81-82.

Moreover, it also produced social problems inside the Iraqi family, such as Abū-Faḥiyyah who, because of his financial situation, forced his daughter into marriage with an older man who already had wives.⁵⁴ Again, the materialism, loss of identity and authoritarian social engineering are concretised in the style of Baghdad's new constructions.⁵⁵ These events depress the protagonist, and make him lose interest in life.

During his relationship with Adele, Tawfiq becomes isolated from his family, since all are deeply involved with one another and with al-Qaṣṣābī's family in developing their financial interests. However, both families consider that it would be to their advantage if Tawfiq were to marry Kamīlah.⁵⁶ Kamīlah, who is a product of this era and society, invades Tawfiq's life at this point in order to get her clutches on him while he is vulnerable. To achieve this aim, she uses her sexuality not for the purpose of spiritual satisfaction, as is the case between Adele and Tawfiq, but in order to dominate and control him. Kamīlah's logic corresponds with that of the group to which she belongs. Like them, she cares only about how to get the most for herself out of her country.⁵⁷

In the year 1966 Tawfiq and Kamīlah become engaged, and during the period of their engagement she continues to use her sexual power over him in a forceful way. If we consider the allegorical interpretation, this relationship refers to the success of corrupt Iraq - the victim of its negative political and social aspects, represented by Tawfiq's mother, 'Abd al-Bārī's family, Al-Qaṣṣābī's family, and especially Kamīlah - in effecting a separation between the modern mentality of the new Baghdad and the intellectual elements of Iraq, represented by Adele and Tawfiq. This is shown to lead to the emigration of progressive thinkers and to the attachment of Iraq's intellectual elements to its negative present. Al-Takarlī conveys the co-option and domination of the intellectual through the marriage between Tawfiq and Kamīlah. The only thing that this

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.64,66-68,77,80-81,88.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 38,42-43.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 51-56, 59-64,72,77,80-81.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.78,80-86.

corrupt phase in the country's history is shown to be incapable of, is obliterating Iraq's yearning for the Baghdad that it had lost.⁵⁸

Tawfiq and Kamīlah are married and because she is more affluent than he is, Tawfiq must surrender to all her wishes, such as living in her house, and going to London for their honeymoon instead of Paris. This inequality sows the seeds of their misery. In fact, the way in which she refuses to go to Paris makes one wonder whether she had known anything of his past relationship with Adele. When Tawfiq and Kamīlah return from their honeymoon, he is shocked to discover that his room in his mother's house has been taken by his brother's children, which means that he has no option to return. Tawfiq's unhappiness and frustrations at this time, mirror those of his era, which is marked by the defeat of the Arabs in 1967. In the novel, this debacle leads to an increase of corrupt practices, which renders Tawfiq unable to participate productively. His impotence to come to the aid of his nation is reflected in his problems with Kamīlah who has not yet become pregnant. His rejection of society increases as he becomes more aware of the amount of hypocrisy in it, such as: Kamīlah's apparent religious devotion contradicting her sexual behaviour before marriage; her refusal to have poker parties in the house at weekends because it is religiously forbidden to gamble, yet her acceptance of Tawfiq's winnings; her uncharitable annoyance when Tawfiq takes Ghassān to school in her car; al-Qaṣṣābī's illness caused by his failure to close a profitable deal, in spite of all his riches; 'Abd al-Bārī's adultery; Tawfiq's own promotion in the ministry that does not improve his financial state; the emergence in government circles of people like Sulaymān al-A'raj, who are given endless power without deserving it; the emergence of a parasite class in the society that would even take advantage of their own children as Abū-Faṭḥiyyah had; Tawfiq's sexual life with his wife that was becoming mechanical since its only function was to be reproductive.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 33-34,37,50,86-88,98.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.48,50.

The only escape that Tawfiq has is to read in his own peaceful corner of the house, isolating him from the rest of the world. He likes reading novels, because they allow him to acquiesce in all the contradictions in human life by simply ignoring them. The other activity that helps him to forget everything else in his life are the poker parties, but he cannot keep this up because of his financial problems and his wife's sexual and emotional demands. Eventually, Tawfiq can no longer resist the pressure from his wife to address their infertility, even though he does not want children with her. Not satisfied with the medical examination Tawfiq is given in Iraq, she insists he goes to London. However, he suggests going to France, she loses her temper with him, increasing his suspicion that she knows something about Adele. In London, Tawfiq is recommended a certain kind of vitamin to increase his sperm count, the reduction in which could be seen as a sign of his refusal to help propagate this corrupt society.

First, Kamilah's family begins to treat Tawfiq with contempt, then even his own mother becomes hostile towards him. His mother feels that her confession to him about her appropriation of the inheritance Tawfiq should have received from his aunt is something that he could always use against her. Suddenly, the reason why Sūr al-Dīn left his entire business to 'Abd al-Bārī and what Adele predicted from reading the dregs of Tawfiq's coffee cup is illuminated. The revelation only makes Tawfiq withdraw more and more into himself, neglecting the entire outside world, except for the young boy, Ghassān with whom he builds a special relationship based on empathy and compassion. Tawfiq who represents the suppressed potential for a new and modern Iraq, associates with the misery of Ghassān who, like Fathiyyah, represents the generation that were victims of the corrupt circumstances. Their relationship is strengthened by the fact that both Tawfiq and Ghassān are rejected by their society.⁶⁰

Tawfiq continues to live in a state of confusion until 1973, when he suddenly decides to take stock of his life and try to work out where it had all begun to go wrong. At the

end of the first chapter, the author - as exterior implied narrator - acknowledges the remedial intent of the novel and its relation to reality.⁶¹

"As the hostility of Kamilah and 'Abd al-Bārī and his mother grew towards Tawfiq, he had to stop and think of what he had and had not done to deserve such aversion. The seeds of discomfort and irritation were being sown and were starting to grow and spread so fast that they were threatening to smother him unawares. Therefore, the pages of this book will be dedicated to the revelation of the mistakes we committed and to set us free from them, and the ones we did not commit, which therefore burden us all the more."⁶²

The use of the word 'we' is a reminder that the author and the protagonist share a culture and, perhaps, the same struggle.

The second chapter of the novel begins with the voice of the protagonist merged with the voice of the author. The implied exterior narrator who narrated the events of the last chapter identifies with the protagonist. At this point, the socio-political agenda overrides the novel's dialogic quality. It is as though the author is compelled to reveal his identification with the protagonist as a contemporary who can offer the benefit of hindsight. This kind of narration is usually used for social and political topics, allowing authoritative comment to expose the allegory.⁶³

Autobiographical writing makes the individual's private life become a public one. It creates an exterior observation and interest in the social and political life during a certain period. In the novel, it puts the lives of the fictional characters in perspective; showing their actions to be constrained by their temporal reality. Bakhtin calls this the:

". . . exterior real-life chronotope in which the representation of one's own . . . life is realized either as a verbal praise of a civic-political act or as an account of the self. It is

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 47,54,88-92,95-98,100-104.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁶² Ibid., p. 104. My translation.

⁶³ For further discussion of this point, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 155.

precisely under the conditions of this real-life chronotope, in which one's own life is laid bare (that is made public), that the limits of a human image and the life it leads are illuminated in all their specificity."⁶⁴

The narrative time becomes visible and the events concrete, which means that the chronotope of such narrative technique materialises time in space.

"Elements which are . . . purely personal, or . . . narrowly professional, or matters relating to society and the state, or even philosophical ideas, are all laid out in one detailed series, tightly interwoven. All these elements are perceived as completely homogeneous, and they come together to form a single human image that is both complete and fully formed. The individual's consciousness of himself in such cases relies exclusively upon those aspects of his personality and his life that are turned outward, that exist for others in the same way they exist for the individual himself; in those aspects alone can self-consciousness seek its support and integrity; it knows of no aspects other than these, aspects that might be intimately personal, unrepeatable individual, charged with self."⁶⁵

Bakhtin then states that this kind of exteriority of the individual could not exist in an empty space, but has to exist in the individual's own shared space between him and his people, "[t]herefore, the *unity* of a man's externalized wholeness was a *public* nature."⁶⁶ Allowing Tawfiq to speak directly, through the medium of his diary, reinforces his significance as a representative of his nation at a specific juncture. His inner thoughts and private suffering are transposed onto the public sphere, drawing our attention to the increasing erosion of the private-public boundary at that time in Iraq, as the regime and its policies invaded people's personal lives.

As we read Tawfiq's diary, which begins on 6 February, 1975 and finishes on 17 February, 1978, we realise that it is rather irregular and infrequent. Also, since the

⁶⁴ M. M. Bakhtin, "The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays", M. Holquist and C. Emerson (trans.) in Pam Morris (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 186.

⁶⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

previous chapter ends in the year 1973, there is a gap of more than a year. The former observation may be reflective of the arbitrary disruptions the regime caused in peoples' lives. The latter suggests that a stagnancy has set in, of which the diarist is part.

Tawfiq only decides to begin writing a diary after much hesitation. He is hesitant because he does not yet have the mental strength to enable him to face the real and repulsive reasons behind the corruption of society. This kind of writing is intended as a confrontation between him and all the negative aspects of life inside Iraq. He starts writing in his rounded corner, where he feels at peace with the rest of the world, in spite of it being part of the cold hallway of a house he cannot call a home. There, he begins to describe his miserable emotional and sexual life with his wife, Kamīlah. This debilitates him and makes him feel as if all his powers - both mental and physical - are being sucked out by his wife. His relationship with his wife, as pictured here, mirrors the reality of his country that was prevented from developing itself by the opportunistic class that controlled it. He also describes the extent of the decline that had spread through the country, exemplified by the arbitrary powers of Sulaymān al-A'raj, Ghassān's emotional turmoil, and the deterioration of his own relationship with his mother and brother. Tawfiq asserts that when a diary is read, not only should the facts that are written be acknowledged, but also the concerns which can be deduced from what is missing: "it is not only the written word that is important but to read what is not written. That is different from reading between the lines, as they say. First of all, I despise what they say and secondly, I think that reading the unwritten text means reading another, non-existent text, and not reading 'between the lines'."⁶⁷ This advice has a double purpose: it offers us a clue not only through which to understand Tawfiq's true feelings and beliefs but also for interpreting the novel itself. The parallel between

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

⁶⁷ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 108. My translation.

the personal diary and the political novel is implicit here. Both are used as vehicles of covert expression where overt expression is dangerous or impossible.⁶⁸

Tawfiq tells us in his diary about his neighbour, Dr. 'Abd al-Jawād Maḥmūd, who committed suicide. He was a professor of philosophy at the university and according to Ghassān, was considered to be one of the best teachers there. The professor was forty-seven years old, had three children and a very good standard of living, so no one knew the reason for his suicide.⁶⁹ It seems that the professor represented the honest people of Iraq who were fighting the system in isolation; when such people's earnest efforts are repeatedly thwarted, they preferred to die, as a sign of their rejection of the corrupt state of the country. Tawfiq imagine himself in the professor's position, which implies the possibility of Iraq's slow suicide by losing the honest people of its nation.

As a reaction to his own impotence Tawfiq throws himself even further into the nightlife of the city with his friends, longing for Adele and for the bold modern elements of Baghdad from which he is now separated. He also visits the al-Afrāḥ markets looking for the source of the strong ambition in the current generation. This is represented by Fathiyyah, who, having been harmed by the country's unstable situation, is trying to build her own world within it. He senses in Fathiyyah's world, all the security that he lacks in his own family home.

Tawfiq's diary entries reveal how his attitude has begun to change since he began this introspection and critical awareness of the world around him. He is quicker to anger and begins to realise that everyone has abandoned him because of his refusal to become a part of their distorted world.⁷⁰ We witness Tawfiq's growing repulsion towards the reality that he is living and an ominous feeling that some sort of catastrophe is about to

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 77,80,105-108,111-115,117-119,124-128,130,142-149,158-173. For further discussion about biographical and autobiographical writing in the novel, see M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 130-146.

⁶⁹ *Al Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 109-110. The story about the professor was originally one of al-Takarfi's short stories called *al-Waḥsh* that is included in the collection *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah al-Qiṣaṣ*, op.cit., pp. 53-54.

befall him mounts. He tries to address what he reads into his personal life and to the miserable situation of the country in a constructive way, but finds no precedent in the experiences of other societies, as they do not match Iraq's complexity.⁷¹ As if to counteract that reality, he persistently recalls and dreams of Adele, who represents an idealised age of Baghdad before the city was overwhelmed by the unstable political events that were taking place in Iraq and in the rest of the Arab countries.

Tawfiq tells us in his diary that he decided one day to go for a walk in the streets of Baghdad, trying to discover the obscure codes of political life. He knows that all moral criteria and standards were subject to change in Baghdad, because of the arbitrary way the regime was run. Tawfiq sat leaning on one of the rails of Balqīs Café, watching the flow of the river at sunset. The whole of this scene is symbolic; it represents the country's strong desire to be aware of and familiar with what was going on, and how very rapidly things were deteriorating. Like the river, Iraq was trying to negotiate the flow of time and connect events with each other to find out where the mistakes that had led to its isolation had been made.⁷² Tawfiq subconsciously refuses to procreate in his wife's society, because he does not want to be connected to such a repulsive society. The political apathy into which the nation has sunk, is demonstrated in Tawfiq's occupation with enjoying simple pleasures in life, such as reading, listening to music and gathering with old friends.⁷³

Through Tawfiq's observations, we see that the social and governmental environment was worsening in Baghdad, represented by Ghassān's social situation as a child who has been abandoned by his mother, and the rise to power of al-A'raj in the ministry.⁷⁴ The

⁷⁰ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 112-114,120-122,142-144.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 115-117,142-144,166-167,170-171.

⁷² *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp.122,158-160,170-171. For further discussion on literary descriptions of the flow of time in the city and its demarcation of social and cultural differences between generations, see: Stephen Spender, "Poetry and the modern city" and David Ignatow, "Living with the change" in Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (eds.), op.cit., pp. 45-49,193-207.

⁷³ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 122-124,154,156,170-171.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 128-129.

decay of the social fabric in Iraq is further demonstrated by the engagement of the lawyer, Mumtāz, and 'Abd al-Bārī's elder daughter, Najdiyyah. Tawfiq had regarded Najdiyyah as different from the degenerate world of Baghdād,⁷⁵ but he suddenly discovers that she is a natural product of that degeneration because she accepts the marriage proposal and the relinquishment of all her ambitions, simply for the status of being a married woman. From Tawfiq's point of view, Mumtāz epitomises the decadent side of Baghdad. This is conveyed in the way he had changed his family's name, the way he proposes to Najdiyyah, and the way he demands she give up all her ambitions to marry him.⁷⁶ Najdiyyah's marriage to Mumtāz with all its ceremony portrays the repugnant side of tradition in Baghdad at that time.⁷⁷ Tawfiq feels that his city is drowning in an overwhelmingly negative current, so he again immerses himself in the nightlife of the drowning city - and a destructive combination of regressive traditions, mindless materialism and authorial rule - and gambles, as everything else of worth was being gambled there.⁷⁸

When Mumtāz and Najdiyyah's wedding ceremony is over, the family goes to visit them in Khanaqin, near Darbūnat al-Shawādy. This journey leads Tawfiq to be reconnected with his roots,⁷⁹ and become better acquainted with Anwār, the wife of his second cousin, Kāsib Burhān al-Dīn. Anwār's beauty and personality captivate him and he feels that his wife, Kamīlah, looks dull and lustreless beside her.⁸⁰ Anwār is a Kurdish woman from the North of Iraq, and with her beauty and her proud character, represents the beautiful and proud world of her people. This makes everyone admire and respect her. Her marriage to a Southern Arab and her relocation to the South represent the extent of the merging between the two main ethnic groups in Iraq and their desire to live with

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.129-131.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 89-90,129,130-131.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 131. For further discussion, see Edward Soja, "History : geography : modernity", *The Cultural Studies Reader*, op.cit., p. 136-150.

⁷⁸ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 132.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.132.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.132-136.

each other in harmony, despite all the attempts that were being made to isolate the Kurds from the rest of the nation. The marriage of Anwār to Kāsib, can be read as the Kurdish nation's desire to live in peace with the Arabs. The spiritual and cultural connection between the two peoples is further illustrated by Anwār's relationship with Tawfiq. He expresses his admiration for Anwār by kissing her, overcoming all the inhibitions of being in the presence of other people. Although Tawfiq feels that someone is watching them, for the first time in his life he could not care less. He is fed-up with the strictures through which life in Iraq is denying him happiness.⁸¹

Tawfiq's admiration for Anwār and his new found understanding of Iraqi society, give him the mental and emotional strength to try to correct some of the problems. He tries to help the head manager in the ministry to resist the onset of corruption, advising him to re-establish order by taking away al-A'raj's power. Tawfiq begins to reject the reality that makes a citizen, such as himself, feel in constant danger of being crushed by some faceless force. He is aware that this feeling has been generated amongst the people of Iraq by the likes of al-A'raj, and the conditions which had allowed them to wield power.⁸²

In his diary, Tawfiq describes Kamīlah's sexual assault on him. He is drunk and asleep, following a party that the whole family had attended, when he is suddenly awoken by the pain that his wife is inflicting on him:

"While I was asleep a strange unfamiliar feeling came over me. I felt I was having a wet dream . . . I was half asleep half awake, I felt delirious and that I was coming down with something and that I must wake up, but I was burdened, senseless and unable to move. A few nightmarish seconds passed before I could open my eyes, which were still heavy with sleep. Then I saw her sitting astride me, bouncing frantically up and down upon my organ as if possessed, while moaning and panting. I thought this could not be real and that I must be

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 134-142,151.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 136-142,166-167.

very seriously ill. The hysterical movement of her heavy body on my stomach and chest left me fighting for breath. I stretched out my arms towards her waist and held her firmly in an attempt to save my self. We had been avoiding and dodging each other for the past two weeks; but this was no excuse for such a suicidal act! I yelled at her: 'What is happening? What has got into you?' The crazy bitch then replied breathless: 'I am claiming what is rightfully mine.' And that is what I call bestial instinct."⁸³

Kamīlah behaves in the way in which her social class would behave towards anything that they wanted from their country. Their personal benefit was much more important to them than anything else in Iraq; in fact, they were sucking all aspects of welfare, benefit, and fortune from the country. This idea is captured in Kamīlah's act of rape against Tawfīq.⁸⁴ The aggressive approach that Kamīlah's class adopts is reflected in their familial lives, even in their most intimate relationships, because it is the only language that they understand.

Tawfīq continues describing the wearying situation in Iraq by mentioning the unproductive nature of his work at the ministry due to al-A'raj's arbitrariness. This impression is confirmed by the visit to Baghdad of Najiyyah, Anwār and their husbands, for infertility treatment; it seems that most of the people in Iraq at that time have fertility problems, reflecting the cultural sterility of the nation.⁸⁵ Because of Anwār's presence that lights up Tawfīq's dim world, he feels happy and able to view life afresh. The fact that Anwār is a part of that world during those moments, brings a ray of happiness into his life. He tries to embrace her in his arms but she refuses to surrender herself to him because she is married. She tells him this in a very polite manner, without hiding her real feelings of admiration for him. Tawfīq respects Anwār's wishes, and his esteem for her character grows.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., p. 146. My translation.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 145-147.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 149-151.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 151-154.

Najiyyah and Anwār return to Khanaqin after their completion of the medical treatment. This once more pushes Tawfiq out of the world that he had accepted while Anwār was in it, and he returns to the company of his poker friends. From them, he learns that Adele is about to return to Iraq after twelve years. In a flashback, Tawfiq remembers how their relationship had begun twelve years ago. Al-Takarlī portrays Tawfiq's sorrow by saying that his soul was filled with darkness even though nature was full of the brightness of the sun at that moment.⁸⁷ Here again al-Takarlī uses the method of contrast between nature and a character's emotions.

Tawfiq continues his observations of society in Iraq by describing the relationship he develops with the other half of the victimised generation in Iraq. In al-Afrāḥ Market and in Abū-Faṭḥiyyah's room, Tawfiq discovers that a marginalised, haphazard and aimless world is developing, created by Faṭḥiyyah and her father's class. We hear him describing his impressions in his dairy, saying: "I was shocked by the current state of 'Souk al-Afrāḥ' - the repulsive griminess, the filthy mess, the hubbub and the noise; when did all of this happen?"⁸⁸

He is astonished by the rules of this world, and realises immediately that he does not fit into it. Faṭḥiyyah's ambition was the kind of ambition that could have destroyed its oppressor, but her group had become victimised as a result of the political instability.⁸⁹ Throughout these gloomy events, the one piece of news that offers Tawfiq a ray of joy and hope is Anwār's pregnancy, the fertility of a mixed race union promising benefit to a divided Iraq.⁹⁰

Tawfiq describes how he lost his temper with al-A'raj, signifying the latent violence bubbling beneath the surface of the oppressed. Each psychological pressure that had

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 155-157.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 164. My translation.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 80,164-165.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 167-170.

been exerted upon him - whether by his wife and family or by al-A'raj in the ministry - accumulates until he finally reaches the limits of his endurance⁹¹:

"It was well past ten in the morning and getting very hot and sticky with the humidity when Sulaymān barged into my office kicking the door violently; his face bore the expression of fury and madness. He stepped forward and threw a bundle of files onto my desk so violently that they scattered and some fell into my lap. He then stood silent and defiant, his lips trembling and his, now, blue face was contorted with anger. I felt dizzy and knew right then that I was past caring. I stood up and walked quietly towards him and said:

-I already warned you not to behave like this with me.

And then I slapped his cheek so hard that his head hit the door, I followed it with a kick to his side that left him in a heap, screaming for help."⁹²

Afterwards, there is a ministry investigation into the incident between Tawfiq and al-A'raj. Tawfiq feels uncomfortable because of the resentment with which the head manager treats him and the way the rest of the employees show their sympathy towards him. At his brother's house, he relates the whole story to his sister-in-law, Thurayyā, who is surprised that he could have been driven to do such a thing. She sympathises with him and tells him to take care of himself because these days no one can be trusted, and he knows that she is right.⁹³ The next day when he returns home from work, he finds his wife waiting for him wanting to find out what had happened the day before. He answers her harshly because he feels that she is only interested in what would happen to him so that she can re-evaluate her relationship with him according to his new position in the ministry. Tawfiq also discovers that al-A'raj has many important connections in the government, which suggests that Tawfiq will not get off lightly.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 174-175.

⁹² Ibid., p. 174. My translation.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 175-176.

For the first time, Tawfiq feels that he is in a vulnerable position, lacking both contacts in the government and money for the case. Even the head manager in the ministry, who had always respected Tawfiq, keeps a distance from him. In this predicament, Tawfiq strongly represents most of his nation, who resent the negative practices of their government yet lack the necessary power to confront the corruption. Tawfiq sinks into deep seclusion, waiting for the moment he will face his fate alone, like the rest of his weak nation.

There is then a period of respite, in which both Tawfiq and al-A'raj receive a formal warning from the ministry but nothing more. Tawfiq, his family and Kamilah's family feel relieved. Two weeks earlier, Najdiyyah had come to Baghdad from Khanaqin to give birth to her first child. During this period, 'Abd al-Bārī and his wife Thurayyā suggest to Tawfiq and Kamilah that they should get back together and neither of them object, especially since Tawfiq had always yearned to live a normal life with his wife if only she would change for the better. He is also happy when he learns from Najdiyyah that Anwār is very happy in her pregnancy, which is making her look even more beautiful. During these days everything seems to be back to normal and Iraq seems as if it may become fertile again.⁹⁴

However, Tawfiq notices that the impact of his confrontation with al-A'raj resulted in al-A'raj's reverberating at the Ministry. When he wants to leave work an hour early to visit his niece, Najdiyyah, in hospital, the head manager does not allow him to do so and speaks harshly to him. Tawfiq realises that the matter is far from resolved and that his position at the ministry is in jeopardy. Tawfiq is surprised that the head manager could so easily switch his behaviour towards him, even though he is aware of the truth behind the incident. He is astonished at how cowardly and hypocritical his people can be when it comes to their own interests, and is disgusted with the corrupt government institutions.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 177-178.

This, in turn, makes him more dependent on Kamīlah, since he is in need of some kind of emotional support during this difficult time and has no one else to turn to.⁹⁵

As a result of what is happening, Tawfiq becomes more isolated from the practical aspects of life in Iraq, and his only enjoyment comes from reading novels and listening to music. The only positive outcome of the incident at the ministry is the respect he begins to feel from everyone around him, even his wife treats him more respectfully. He feels that such a watershed event had to take place in his life in order to prove to himself and others that he could not always be insulted.⁹⁶ Soon, what Tawfiq feared comes true. He not only loses his job at the ministry and is prohibited from working in any other branches of the government, but he is also banned from practising as a lawyer for five years. When he tells his wife the news, she begins crying and cursing, then suddenly leaves him alone running to her parents' house. No one offers to support him and he is left alone to face his fate.⁹⁷ Of all his family, only Thurayyā is honest with him. She tells him that he has to be strong in facing his future since no one can stand beside him, not even herself or his brother - in spite of her respect for him as a person - because the disaster that has befallen him exceeded anyone's expectations.

Tawfiq begins to feel the mental and psychological effects of his dismissal. He is ostracised by his family and his wife's family. His wife begins treating him badly again, and she refuses to have marital relations with him. When he insists on the latter, she does not respond to him and immediately afterwards, takes the car keys from him and spends nights at her parents' house. All of his friends keep their distance from him. Only Anwār and her husband treat him kindly and he is very touched when he learns that they have called their son after him. Abū-Fathiyyah is the only other person who keeps in touch with him during this period, visiting him at the house from time to time. He tells Tawfiq of developments at the ministry, such as al-A'raj's assumption of Tawfiq's

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 179-182.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 182-184.

position without any resistance from the head manager. From this, we can infer the rise of the corrupt and arbitrary elements in the government and the nation after its success in demolishing the power of the honest parts. For all these reasons, Tawfiq loses interest in all the things that he likes to do and suffers deep anxiety.⁹⁸

At the end of this chapter the author uses the technique of analepsis as Tawfiq is writing the final page in his diary some time after the events have happened. He is writing in the quarter of al-‘Āmil, in a room he is renting in Fathiyyah’s house. Two days before the end of 1977, his sister-in-law sends for him and he is told that his wife wants a divorce. He agrees to this and ten days later they are divorced from each other. On the day of the divorce, Tawfiq suddenly learns from his wife in a moment of agitation that she had torn up Adele’s letters to him. This is a denouement that reveals the reasons for Kamīlah’s sharp refusal to go to Paris with him in the past and Adele’s disappearance from his life. He is, then, refused more than one night’s stay in his family house, which he discovers no longer belongs to his mother, but to his brother. Tawfiq is surprised by these two revelations and feels that the opportunist class, which he always refused to submit to, have stolen his life from him. It is Abū-Fathiyyah who ends up offering him accommodation. Abū-Fathiyyah, his wife and their daughter treat him in a very polite and a respectful way. The world of this aimless class, which is reflected by the quarter in which they reside and in the small simple room that Tawfiq is given, contain calmness, domesticity and warmth. Tawfiq thus enters a more truthful, honest and sincere world, which he thinks may allow him to begin a better life than the one he had had in the past. Tawfiq displays optimism in his new environment and decides to stop writing in his diary, which means that he will stop his scrutiny and speculations of Iraq’s complex predicament and start living in a much simpler way.⁹⁹ In the last page of this chapter he says: “my pages are all full up now, there are no more left. And I should

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 184-187.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 188-192.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 87,97-98,192-200.

finally say that despite everything I feel some sort of stability. My heart is set on a new beginning - a happy beginning, perhaps!"¹⁰⁰

Tawfiq's character is a representation of modern Iraq and its people, which leads us to believe that according to this idea, the second chapter of *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* should be understood as an attempt by the author to depict life in modern Iraq from the Inside. This is evident in the authors attempt to connect the private lives of the characters, particularly that of the protagonist with the public events developing in Iraq at that time.

The misery of the Iraqi people originated in the refusal of the older generation to accept change to outmoded social traditions or exert a tempering influence over the material and political ambition of the next generation. This is demonstrated in the attitude of Tawfiq's mother towards him. Tawfiq's mother tries to push him towards marriage with Kamīlah. Tawfiq's refusal and subsequent submission leads to the loss of his power, wealth and peace. He is constantly shown to resist what he knows is wrong, only to be ultimately overpowered by the political system or society itself. We follow this pattern in Tawfiq's relationship with his mother, his wife, his sister-in-law and with al-A'raj in the ministry respectively.¹⁰¹ Tawfiq's degradation and marginalisation reveal the stifling complicity between the conservative, patriarchal mind set and the developing new establishment, based on greed, patronage and aggression.

Baghdad's status as the capital of Iraq differentiates it from the other cities, both throughout its early history and in modern times. This is represented in the novel by the love that Tawfiq feels for his mother's widowed aunt and for Adele. The earlier phases of the city are reflected in his relationship with his aunt, which enhanced his life with its sincerity. The latter phase is represented in Tawfiq's passionate and spiritual relationship with Adele. However, this relationship fails twice, the timing of which reflects the false

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 200. My translation.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 45,47,96,117-119,142-147,171-173,175-176,182-189,193,195-196.

hopes of 1952 and then of al-Qāsim's era, indicating that the time was not yet ripe for a fusion between the developing seeds of the new Iraq and the ancient, time-worn Baghdad. The symbolic union of Tawfīq and Adele takes place despite the obstacles of culture, tradition and social convention in a country that, at the time, clung strongly to religious and cultural moralities.¹⁰² Their true freedom allows them to willingly choose a relationship according to their own desires and in spite of the social taboos that their society is burdened with. Yet, the relationship is not strong enough to confront the unstable political reality of a country that contributes to their separation. The significance of the separation is compounded further by the social classes who had benefited from that political reality. This results in Tawfīq ending up weak and isolated in one of the rooms of Faṭḥiyyah's house in the al-'Āmil quarter, a marginalised world that is itself a consequence of all the negative aspects of the country.¹⁰³

This half of the novel ends with a sense of hope in two respects. The first is the creation of another seed of development in Iraq as a result of the union of the main ethnic groups: the Arabs and the Kurds. This is symbolised by Anwār, Kāsib and their child and Tawfīq's relationship with them.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, there are signs of a new beginning for Tawfīq in the small modest quarter in which he finds himself.¹⁰⁵

In the third chapter, the narrator reverts to separating himself from the protagonist. The voice that we hear in this chapter is the author as the exterior covert narrator. We discover that Kamīlah had been involved in a relationship with the brother of one of her friends to whom she becomes engaged immediately after her divorce from Tawfīq. This explains her often harsh treatment of Tawfīq, why she spent so much time out of the house and the elaborate way in which she used to dress. Her immediate engagement to Jāsim al-Ramaḍānī epitomises the traits of the opportunist class, who often seek a

¹⁰² For further discussion, see Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, James M. Edie (eds) (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 121-159, 196.

¹⁰³ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 80, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 189-190.

substitute for what has been lost or what could not be possessed, because for them everything has to be under their control. Kamīlah cannot control Tawfiq so she has to replace him with someone who she can dominate completely. Kamīlah marries for the second time in July 1978. When she returns from her honeymoon, she is in the second month of pregnancy, but everyone notices that Jāsim's stomach is more prominent than hers. This signifies that Kamīlah has married someone who belongs to the same class as herself and that he, too, knows how to grasp the opportunities that come to him. This is further emphasised by Jāsim living in his wife's house, where she had previously been living with Tawfiq.

Everyone in the family knows that Thurayyā was behind the divorce and second marriage of her younger sister, as she was behind her mother-in-law's agreement to putting her house in 'Abd al-Bārī's name. Thurayyā's character is an important and complex one. She represents a manipulative type, similar to Tawfiq's mother but more forthright in her machinations.

Tawfiq is isolated from the important events that happen to the families of 'Abd al-Mawlā and al-Qaṣṣābī because they do not even know where he lives.¹⁰⁶ He is surprised that since his divorce, he does not think of Kamīlah often and barely remembers her features. This fact emphasises the idea that the social class to which Kamīlah belongs, will not leave any lasting influence on the noble characteristics of life in Iraq.¹⁰⁷

Although Tawfiq feels relaxed and secure during this period, he faces many financial problems due to his unemployment and difficulties in finding another job. Consequently, he seeks help from 'Abd al-Qādir, his best friend since childhood, but his request is refused by his friend.¹⁰⁸ He then visits his brother 'Abd al-Bārī in the carpentry

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 197-200.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 201-202, 212-213.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 203.

workshop, requesting his help in acquiring a simple job but, as usual, he too refuses to support Tawfiq.¹⁰⁹

At this time, Tawfiq is still unfamiliar with the world of the al-'Āmil quarter and the kind of people who inhabit it, such as Fathiyyah and her family. However, because it is the only world that needs his protection and tenderness against the oppressive features in Iraq at that time, Tawfiq becomes accepted within it. This relationship is represented by Tawfiq's gradual acceptance of Fathiyyah's character, despite her aggressiveness towards her parents and the people who rent the shops in her market. He realises that she is a victim of their greed, as well as having problems with the sons of her late husband.¹¹⁰ Tawfiq gradually becomes involved, both mentally and physically, with Fathiyyah and her world. This indicates Iraq's acceptance of the embattled generation which is as much a victim, of the corruption that was taking place, as the rest of the country.¹¹¹

These events in Tawfiq's life show that Baghdad was divided into two distinct parts. The first part is represented by the world of al-Qaṣṣābī, 'Abd al-Bārī, and 'Abd al-Qādir. The second part is represented by the people who were victims of the first, such as Fathiyyah. Tawfiq, whose character represents the idea of a sincere attempt to construct a more unified and modern Iraq, is torn between the two sides of the city. He desperately needs the help of the people who form the backbone of the city, but they are too immersed in the corrupt patronage network that assures the interests of each other. At the same time, he has to understand and embrace the victimised people in the down-trodden part of the city. However, it seems that he fails in his attempt to involve himself with either part of the city. His past life in the first part of the city is obstructed by the opportunist class who dominated life there. This forces him to focus on constructing a strong new life in the second part of the city. Baghdad, a city that consists of two halves,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 204-205.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 80,97,183,206-211,222.

al-Raṣāfah and al-Karkh, with all the districts and quarters that they contain, had strong social divisions as a result of the negative political practices. These two distinct areas have different attitudes and cultures, because they were each the product of different experiences.¹¹²

Towards the end of 1978, Abū-Faṭḥiyyah comes to Tawfiq's room to tell him that his family had contacted the ministry: they wish to inform him of his mother's illness. Tawfiq goes several times to visit his dying mother and is touched by her regret over what she had done to him:

"Her face was pale, devoid from the signs of life. He was surprised by her tenuous smile, He held her hand that was laying on the sheet. She pressed on his fingers weakly and whispered:

- How are you?

He nodded his head to her:

- and You?

- How drastically you have changed Tawfiq!

He wanted for a moment to say to her . . . thanks to your efforts; he smiled faintly and sat near the bed. She pressed on his hand again:

- How drastically you have changed Tawfiq . . . my son!

It saddened him to hear her repeating that sentence, as though she was regretful of what she had done to him; he did not answer her, and saw her closing her eyes calmly."¹¹³

He, too, feels a degree of regret because he had not taken any steps to improve his relationship with his mother, and had allowed Kamilah to humiliate him by proving that

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 213-216.

¹¹² For further discussion of cultural issues, see Chaim Potok, "Culture Confrontation in Urban America: A Writer's Beginnings" in Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (eds.), op.cit., pp. 161-166.

¹¹³ *Al Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 217. My translation.

he was a barren and worthless man. His mother dies at the beginning of 1979,¹¹⁴ an event that symbolises the end of a long historical phase in the country.

Tawfiq feels deep sorrow because he had not stood up strongly enough for his own rights, which might have saved an innocent generation from the corruption that was endemic in the country. This is reflected in the problems Fathiyyah experiences with the sons of her former husband. Tawfiq's sorrow leads him into solitude and weakens him physically to the extent that he experiences fainting spells. His position, during this time, was the opposite to that of al-A'raj, whose obesity is a parody of the greed, sickness and destructiveness of his type: "Clapping both hands together, Abū Fathiyyah told him that Sulaymān Faṭḥ-Allāh had become obese to the extent that his office chair collapsed under his weight and broke, so they changed it for another of iron and still during his working hours he indulges in a variety of snacks."¹¹⁵ The difference between the two characters reflects the weakness and strength of each group. The only refuge that Tawfiq has is his relationship with Fathiyyah, which symbolises the need that her generation feels towards the hope of a better Iraq.¹¹⁶

Tawfiq's journey to Khanaqin to find employment with the help of Mumtāz and Kāsib, in order to have a fresh start, is a similar journey to the one his father had made, but by taking the opposite path; it is a journey that takes him back to his roots, as if Iraq were searching for a new beginning. There, he meets all his relatives and learns about their way of life and how they had migrated to other areas of the country, which symbolises the idea of civilisation spreading from the south to all other parts of the country.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 217.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 228. My translation.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 213, 216-230, 238-239. For further discussion of sex as a symbolic act in this novel, see: Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ, "Riwāyat al-Takarī al-Jadīdah 'al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā': Riwāyat al-Masarrāt al-Insāniyyah al-Qalīlah wal-Awjā' al-'Arabiyyah al-Kathīrah", 2/2, *Al-'Arab*, edition no. 11 (London, 8-12-1998), pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁷ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 230-231.

Tawfiq feels that Kāsib is keener than Mumtāz to help him find a job. Mumtāz begins to draw back when he learns that Tawfiq is prohibited from working as a lawyer for five years. Kāsib suggests to Tawfiq that he should work as a manager in his carpentry workshop and prepares for him the room that is beside the workshop. The character of Kāsib is the opposite of that represented by Mumtāz. Kāsib represents the honest and strong part of the nation that wants to support the development of modern Iraq.¹¹⁸

In Khanaqin, Tawfiq works all day and spends his evenings by himself in his small room reading novels contemplating his past life, trying to understand the mistakes that he had made. After a month in Khanaqin, he visits Baghdad where he spends three days reading in his room in the al-‘Āmil quarter and walking the streets. He feels refreshed while sitting in Ḥasan ‘Ajāmī’s Café and roaming the alleys of Ḥaydar Khānah, as this is his world and the place where he feels at home. It represents the rich heritage of that part of the city where his roots are. This makes him feel warmth and peace in every nook of the café, which overlooked the quarter where he was born and raised. The alleys of that quarter and that café are part of the ancient, solid part of the city and they form Tawfiq’s personal history: “He put the pile of books beside him and ordered another cup of tea. The café, al-Rashīd Street, the stores on either side of it, the mosque, al-Ḥaydar Khānah quarter and those alleys of ill repute were the features of his past that evoked nostalgia and a painful yearning. He was feeling everything around him as if it was pleasantly connected to him.”¹¹⁹ This is a significant intersection where he recovers a part of his soul in that special personal haven, which had been stolen from him.

As the days pass in Khanaqin, Tawfiq begins to adjust to the way of life there, but he also notices that there are a lot of strange things occurring in the city for which he can find no logical explanation. He decides to live his life there without interfering in

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 230-236, 240.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 239-240. For a further discussion of the attachment of a character to his birth place, see: Franco Morretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 13-18; Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, pp. 136, 144; M. Jerry Weiss, “Literature

anything that he cannot understand, until Kāsib is arrested in a night-club in Baghdad and jailed. Anwār's exclusion of Mumtāz as he apparently tries unsuccessfully to free Kāsib leaves Tawfiq with feelings of confusion: that something bigger was happening that was beyond his comprehension. Tawfiq is further confused when he approaches Kāsib's house to obtain the bail money from Anwār where he notices a familiar car driving away from the house, as if someone had been watching it. While at the police station, Tawfiq learns that Mumtāz had lied about the reasons for his failure to free Kāsib. These events generate a state of suspense through which the author succeeds in drawing the reader further into the plot. All the way from Baghdad to Khanaqin, Kāsib refuses to answer Tawfiq's questions, as if he is guarding a secret. It seems that the corruption that was endemic in the capital is spreading to other parts of the country and Mumtāz is an embodiment of this corruption. This does not deter the emotional bond between the desire for modernisation in Iraq and honest people, both Arabs and Kurds; in fact, the bond deepens even further. It shows that just as there were supporters for the corruption that was spreading in Iraq, so were there supporters for the honest people of the nation.

Despite the imprisonment of Kāsib, Tawfiq makes a life in Khanaqin, although he demonstrates a deep attachment to al-‘Āmil quarter and its simple people through his relationship with Faṭḥiyyah.¹²⁰

Upon hearing the news of Kamīlah's complicated pregnancy, the family leaves Khanaqin for Baghdad. Tawfiq feels unable to go with them, embarrassed, as the ex-husband. As he is hesitating over calling Thurayyā to enquire about Kamīlah's health, four armed men burst into his room:

“ . . . He saw them walking towards him . . . His heart started pounding with a premonition of imminent disaster. They asked for his name and ID details and then demanded that he

for Youth: The City as Heaven and or Hell” in Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 239-242.

comes along with them to the organisation office to check a few more things with him . . . that day was truly a day of pain. Then, in a bare-walled room the four men beat him unconscious. They left him afterwards for two days bloodied and exhausted, with no food or water. They came back on perhaps the third or fourth day. He was feverish and his face was swollen and disfigured. He could not stand on his feet so they dragged him to another room where there was someone sitting behind a table smoking calmly . . . The man told him that he was lucky to know people in high places otherwise he could have been executed by now . . . He then ordered him to leave Khanaqin the minute he left that room and told him that he should never consider returning and should not mention even a single word about what had happened to him during the last few days."¹²¹

Even in his debilitated condition, Tawfiq knows he should not be afraid, because, for reasons beyond his comprehension he feels his assailants were more frightened than he was. Kāsib comes to collect him from the headquarters and looks after him in his house, where he receives medical treatment and is unconscious for several days. When Tawfiq regains consciousness and his health improves, Anwār tells him that at the time of his abduction, Kamīlah and her baby had died in childbirth. The timing of this event symbolises the failure of a section of the opportunist class in Baghdad to make any possible contribution to Iraqi culture while the marginalised feel the brunt of their frustration. Tawfiq is alarmed at Anwār's hint that he had been harmed because of her. Upon his return to Baghdad, he secludes himself from society and finds contentment in reading novels, sitting in the cafés, roaming the alleys of the city and trying to comprehend the tragic events of recent days.

He finds communication with members of his family and with Anwār increasingly difficult. The heavy hand of the state is visibly effecting interpersonal relationships. Honest Arabs and Kurds cannot safely interact with each other and this is the reason for

¹²⁰ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 246-248.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 250. My translation.

Tawfiq's return to the al-‘Āmil quarter in Baghdad. Only here, in the forgotten quarter can he re-establish old acquaintances and gain some strength from its relative freedom. He ponders on life in Iraq and tries to comprehend the corruption that is rife at that time. He is bewildered by what he sees in the city and at the strange and unexplained social phenomena that he encounters, such as the flourishing of the opportunist class at a time when most of the people are facing economic problems. That class lets no opportunity slip and often displays parasitical tendencies towards its own members, such as Kamīlah's widowed husband refusing to leave her house. Maintaining their standard of living is the worry that controls their lives. Tawfiq demonstrates his freedom of spirituality and independence from this class through escaping their rigid materialistic binds.

When Tawfiq is again refused financial help from his brother, he can no longer control his temper. Afterwards, he is full of remorse for what he had said. He knows that everything that has happened between him and his family was due to his own weakness. He had dared not confront them over their actions and so was equally to blame due to his passive acceptance of their behaviour towards him:

“He understood, as he was hurrying through the narrow pathways of al-Ḥaydar Khanah, towards al-Rashīd Street, that he had committed a crime against himself more than against his brother or the memory of his mother. Before both of them, he was an individual, conscious of his destiny, aware of life's values. Therefore, he could have looked beyond their actions against him. His mother robbed him and admitted this to him without embarrassment. Yet he had not responded to her; it was the same to him whether he owned or did not own anything. Then his brother had robbed him of his share of what his mother had bequeathed them and he accepted the matter as if it were his fate, not caring if he gained

or lost. What had happened to him in recent days that had made him run panting behind the wheel of money which disappeared over the horizon leaving him covered in its dust?"¹²²

This event reflects the wider predicament of the majority in Iraq, who were too reticent in allowing a minority to exploit the country for their own selfish interests.

The chance meeting between Tawfiq and Adele in a bookshop rouses deep feelings in both once again. But Adele, whose character represents the modern westernised elements of Baghdad is unable to cope with life in Iraq, even in her home city. This means that Adele, despite the idealistic nature of her character, can no longer bear to witness the suffering of her country. The second generation of that class had become increasingly westernised, which results in their losing touch with their original roots. This is symbolised by the character of Adele's daughter, who does not even know how to speak Arabic. Both Tawfiq and Adele know that there is no permanent place for the other in their life. He asks her to leave the country without saying goodbye to him, because he cannot bear to lose her again. He also asks for a lock of her hair as the only symbol of her existence in his life and they promise that they will write to each other. She leaves without saying goodbye, exactly as he had asked, which surprises him; he had not thought she would be able to do so. This awakens him to the extent of change that has taken place in her character. She is now a practical woman, rather than a romantic; her life in Paris has changed her. She cannot understand his deep weakness, which is a result of the difficult and unstable life in Iraq. However, Tawfiq harbours a slight hope that the bond between them will not end, if she keeps her promise to write to him. This event is a turning point in Tawfiq's life, as it gives him a short period of happiness, but also alerts him to the huge difference in their characters that was a natural result of their different experiences and life style. This event indicates the simple truth that Iraq's salvation needs to come from within, from its own people, not from outside

¹²² Ibid., p. 263. My translation.

influences, especially not from those who have lost touch with their own roots in Iraq and stopped feeling the suffering of their own people.¹²³

After Adele's departure, Tawfiq withdraws from all aspects of life in Baghdad and locks himself in his room in the al-'Āmil quarter for a week. The reminder of Adele's love for him makes him appreciate the happiness that he is missing in life and also helps him to overcome the humiliation that he had experienced after the attack. He begins to realise that there is no use in isolating himself from the world. Recognising this helps him to rally his spirits and put his life in order again. There is a moral implication in his predicament: it is not wise for the people in Iraq to seek happiness outside the limits of their reality, even if this happiness is in the hands of an idealistic class that had once belonged to Iraq.¹²⁴

Just as normality is beginning to re-establish itself, Tawfiq learns from a reliable source that Mumtāz, who was the most important figure in the city of Khanaqin and represented the government there, was actually behind the attack on him. Mumtāz's reasons were his jealousy of Tawfiq because, he, too had wanted to reach Anwār's heart, but had failed. Mumtāz did not know how to gain Anwār's love in the way that Tawfiq had and this led him to violent means. From the beginning, Mumtāz represents the dark corrupt part of the government at that time and its resentment and violence towards honest citizens such as Tawfiq.

This revelation throws light on the mysterious events of this chapter: the imprisonment of Kāsib; Anwār's confession that she was the cause of attack; Kāsib's secretive behaviour; the surveillance of Kāsib and Anwār's house; and the way that his sister-in-law had looked surprised when he asked her about his niece and Mumtāz. This event symbolises what had been taking place in Iraq throughout Ba'th Party rule. It

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 264-270.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 270,278.

represents the government's desire to dominate the Kurdish nation and separate them from the Arab nation, in order to weaken Iraq's development.¹²⁵

Tawfiq becomes determined to resume his normality and begins to interact again with life in Baghdad and in al-‘Āmil quarter by celebrating the beginning of a new year with Fathiyyah, her family and the little homeless boy Ḥasan. These are people who love him and who had supported him in times of hardship. He once more begins to allow the people whom he loved, such as Ghassān and his own brother, ‘Abd al-Bārī, to re-enter his life. He shows that the Iraqi people were striving for a sense of normality, which had almost been lost.¹²⁶

But Tawfiq's attempt to resume his normal life proves unsuccessful; his family reject him after the confrontation between him and his brother and he is also rejected by his old friends, who played their part in the corruption of the country. This idea is portrayed in the second meeting that took place between Tawfiq and his closest friend ‘Abd al-Qādir. Tawfiq also realises that he has lost Adele for good as she does not keep her promise to write to him. The only people who need him are the victimised and damaged people of Baghdad, such as Ghassān, Fathiyyah and Ḥasan. His only ally in opposing the system is Anwār, who escapes the corruption endemic within the central and the southern parts of Iraq to where her people live in the North, where the nation of the Kurds were continuing to struggle against this corruption with all their strength. The intellectual class in Iraq was as isolated from the powerful classes of Baghdad as it was from the Kurds, the courageous part of the nation. The only other world that this generation was allowed to be part of was the suppressed class of Iraq, the simple and weak people who had developed their own anarchic world inside the oppressive city of Baghdad, after being marginalised from its social mainstream.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 89-90, 128-136, 240-246, 250-253, 261, 278-281.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 269, 272-281.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 281-291, 310-311.

Tawfiq's relations with his brother's family then begin to improve but continues to be excluded from their financial affairs. His relationship with Kāsib cools, especially as Anwār remains in the North. Once again Tawfiq is left without any base but Fathīyyah's world. Yet now the fusion between him and that world is complete. He becomes more accepted in the world of the al-ʿĀmil quarter and his small room in Fathīyyah's house comes to be a haven for him. He embraces the world of Ghassān and his kind stepmother Sundus, whom Tawfiq had always respectfully admired. He had often thought of her as a kind and giving mother which both he and Ghassān had never had. She is a woman wholly different from Kamīlah, Adele or even Fathīyyah.¹²⁸

His happiness began to be restricted to the world of the al-ʿĀmil quarter, where he spent most of his time reading novels and trying to help the people there, detaching himself from the venal world of Iraq that had made al-A'raj the head manager of the ministry where he used to work, and Mumtāz the mayor of Khanaqin. The fact that a person like al-A'raj is able to conceal all his misdeeds, and his increasing weight that causes his iron chair to break yet again, symbolise the extent of exploitation that this part of the government had reached.¹²⁹ As we hear Abū Fathīyyah describing to Tawfiq this event:

"It did not break like the chairs of other god fearing people, but it suddenly split apart and cracked from all sides as they say, our honrroubale general manager fell amidst the wooden rubble causing his cloth to tare especially his trousers and was inflicted with several injuries. Carrying him, transporting the pieces of wood and cleaning the place truly wore us out, sometimes troubles land from the sky without knowing how or when."¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 291-300,302-309,313-316.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 301-310,312,314-315. For further discussion, see Ṣabṛī Ḥafīz, "Riwāyat al-Takarī al-Jadīdah 'al-Masarrāt al-Insāniyyah al-Qalīlah wal-Awjā' al-'Arabiyyah al-Kathīrah", op.cit., pp. 14-15.

¹³⁰ *Al-Masarrāt wal Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 315. My translation.

This results in the rise of opportunists without any dignity like Jāsim al-Ramaḍānī and the sons of Fathiyyah's former husband, who lived on sucking benefits from their own class.

The chapter ends with two kernel events: Anwār's moving to Baghdad to settle in Kamīlah's old house with her husband and son and Ghassān's entry into the world of the protagonist.¹³¹

In the fourth and final chapter of the novel, the voice of the exterior covert narrator, again merges with the voice of the protagonist Tawfiq. Through this technique, the author tries to depict the circumstances that the intellectuals of the country went through from two different points of view. One deals with the effects of those circumstances seen objectively, by one who is not directly involved, i.e. the covert narrator, the author and the second deals with the effects of those same circumstances on someone who is actually experiencing them by merging the voices of the author with that of the protagonist.¹³²

This chapter is set in mid 1980 and early 1981 when the younger victimised generation were failing to change the cultural rules of their society, because of their own personal conflicts. It was a time when they had the wealth to help to stabilise the country but did not have the courage or wisdom to do so. This made them fall into a state of depression and they wanted to lean on an older generations to help them in overcoming their own social contradictions. We see this interaction in the meeting between Ghassān and Tawfiq at the beginning of this chapter.¹³³

The opportunistic class were beginning to turn against each other and the features of the relationships within this class began to change and show themselves at their worst. This idea is represented through 'Abd al-Bārī and Thurrayyā's changed relationship with

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 316-317.

¹³² For further analysis of the technique of narrative, see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *op.cit.*, pp. 240-272.

their son-in-law Mumtāz. Their normal quiet life loses its lustre. On the other hand, in the country at large, Arabs and Kurds began to unite and connect spiritually with each other. This is portrayed clearly by those people from both groups who were resisting the corruption in the country and who saw in Baghdad a kind of protection from the terror of the regime which was spreading in a more apparent way in the northern and southern parts of Iraq. This is represented by Anwār's moving to Baghdad with her husband and Tawfiq's dream of Anwār.¹³⁴

Since Anwār and Kāsib had moved to Baghdad, Tawfiq is able to enter into an emotional and spiritual relationship with Anwār and encourages her and her husband to be brave no matter how much pressure she is under. This unique relationship between Tawfiq and Anwār portrays the great bond between Iraq and the Kurds and the spiritual strength that each inspires in the other. Tawfiq allows Ghassān to enter his world in al-ʿĀmil quarter, where affection immediately springs up between Fathiyyah and Ghassān. Both of them belong to the same victimised generation, which makes them need each other's love and they are united in their love of Iraq, symbolised by their relationship with Tawfiq, as well as by the difficult social circumstances that both had suffered. In spite of the fact that everything seems to be going smoothly at that time, there is a strange feeling spreading across the whole country that something is about to happen, which will cause bloodshed. An indication of this is Thurayyā's conversation with Tawfiq about the nature of the sunset in those days and the conversation between him and Ghassān about Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* and about Dostoevsky's point of view of God and morals as demonstrated in his novels.¹³⁵

The most important event here is Anwār's total rejection of him when he tries to persuade her to make love with him. This is a kernel event in the novel. She completely excludes him from her life by shutting the door of her house in his face. This harsh

¹³³ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjāʾ*, op.cit., pp. 273-277,286,314,317,319-329,330.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 328-331.

rejection, which makes Tawfiq become very ill, is narrated by him through both the techniques of prolepsis and analepsis. The reason for using these techniques in narrating this event is to show the extent of its psychological effect on Tawfiq. It seems that Anwār rejects Tawfiq so totally because she feels that their relationship is beset by obstacles. This event represents the relationship of the Kurds with Iraq: although they love Iraq, they cannot accept it as it is because of all the corruption in the country, as well as the fact that they are not accepted for what they are. The Kurds faced complex problems in their status in Iraq, whether in the political or even the social aspect. Anwār's desire to live in Baghdad represents her people's desire to begin a new life in that city away from the social collapse that was more apparent in other parts of the country. Tawfiq, whose character represents Iraq at that time, feels hurt during those moments when he is standing in front of the closed door of the house because he feels that he has lost the only person who loved him no matter what happened and was noble in loving him. This is the difference in Anwār's love for Tawfiq, in comparison with all the other women whom he had known such as Adele, Kamīlah and Fathiyyah.¹³⁶ Standing before Anwār's threshold Tawfiq fully understands this reality for the first time:

"In front of her firmly closed door, I faced the contrary of happiness. Only then did it suddenly become apparent to me. I knew it, because before it I was happy . . . In the end the door was closed, completely and utterly, closed for good. I froze for a while in the darkness, hiding my self shyly from prying eyes. Those moments were like stabs of the dagger. I wanted to understand without any pain, but that was unfortunately impossible. After a while, with gouche movements I went on rapping the door lightly with my finger tips in a way that no one would hear. I was in shock, rejected and feeling confused."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 331-354.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 316,354-362.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 359-360. My translation.

Tawfiq's relationship with Fathiyyah and her irregular world becomes one built on respect, cordiality and sincere affection. At the same time, she becomes closely involved with Ghassān. In fact, she succeeds in transforming the banal, insipid and unhappy world of that young man and both find their lost happiness in the other. Tawfiq fears the strong passion between Fathiyyah and Ghassān because he believes that the present unstable circumstances would not allow it to develop naturally. For that reason, Tawfiq feels a kind of responsibility towards both of them, especially Fathiyyah, who had stood beside him through every trial. He advises her to slow down in her relationship with Ghassān but she refuses to do so. The giving of the advice is inferred through the use of the ellipsis technique, as the narrator only shows, the effect on Fathiyyah and her reaction to being given such advice, which makes the situation more dramatic by heightening her surprise.¹³⁸

Al-Qassābī dies at this time, which indicates the end of a completely negative generation that was the product of one of the ruinous historical phases that the country had endured. Of course, the negative effects of that era did not simply break up and ebb away as they had left strong traces that had marred the depths of the Iraqi society. These traces are depicted in the characters of Thurayyā and her family and this idea is emphasised by the argument that takes place between Thurayyā, Jāsim al-Ramaḍānī and Tawfiq about the money that her father left for al-Ramaḍānī. This situation emphasises how the members of this materialistic class turned against one another when they had conflicting interests, whether social, economic or even political. At the funeral, Tawfiq, as the symbol of the country and the people becomes aware that he is stronger than Mumtāz, who is ashamed even to look Tawfiq in the eye.¹³⁹ However, he sees that Mumtāz still has a lot of power over the lives of Kāsib and Anwār who try to avoid

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 362-380.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 250,283-284,381.

interacting with him during the funeral ceremonies.¹⁴⁰ Thus, we perceive the state's pervasive tentacles reaching out to interfere with Arab-Kurdish unity.

As Tawfiq is leaving Thurayyā's house and stepping out of her threshold, the telephone rings and Thurayyā breaks the news to Tawfiq that Mumtāz had been killed in his house in Khanaqin, together with his mistress, by Iranian bombing in that area. This seems to indicate that the superficial mendacious world that was built on the negative political and social factors had begun to collapse as a result of those same negative practices. The rupture of 'Abd al-Bārī's family with Mumtāz and al-Ramaḍānī was an internal intimation of the political and social wreckage of the regime and the problems that it would cause, such as the external political dealings which caused the Iraq-Iran War. Tawfiq's stepping out of that world at that moment, epitomises the desire of the honest part of the Iraqi nation to break out of that ravaged world, which was filled with hypocritical social conventions, such as the concern of 'Abd al-Mawlā's family to bury Mumtāz while trying to conceal the fact that his mistress had died with him.¹⁴¹

War against Iran was declared and Iran began to bomb Baghdad at the end of September 1980. Fathiyyah and Ghassān's love had been growing stronger and Ghassān proposes to her in front of her parents when he learns that he will be going to the front line. He also wants to take her to his family's house to introduce her to them but she refuses, insisting on doing that after his return in the company of her parents and Tawfiq. Meanwhile, Tawfiq is still searching for his own happiness in a world, which is beginning to disintegrate because of the smell of death that is spreading everywhere. He had failed to gain happiness with Adele or Anwār and knows he cannot give Fathiyyah the untainted young love that Ghassān gives her, which makes her glow with happiness and contentment. Tawfiq needs to love someone to prove to himself that he is still alive, in spite of all his misfortune and the prevalence of death in Iraq. Nevertheless, Tawfiq

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 375,377,381-383.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 392-394.

still feels responsible for the victimised generation in Iraq, represented by Ghassān and Fathīyyah. He tries to alert Ghassān to the responsibilities that lie ahead of him because of his declaration of love for Fathīyyah, again, Tawfiq fails just as he had when he tried to talk to Fathīyyah about the same subject. Fathīyyah and Ghassān's relationship fulfils both of them. At the same time, it also represents their resistance to the aspects of death that are spreading.¹⁴²

Tawfiq, who reaches the age of forty-eight without ever being involved in a stable relationship, is anxious to form such a relationship. This leads him for the first time in his life to appreciate and regret the faults that had caused the loss of his relationship with Adele, the way he had treated Anwār that had made her throw him out of her life, and the inferior way in which he had treated Fathīyyah most of the time, because of her social background. Tawfiq feels that he has lost hope of finding true love and his anxiety and desperation lead him to try to gain love by using force. The desperate, uncivil times of the nation are demonstrated by Tawfiq's rape of Fathīyyah on the steps of the house during one of Iran's night air raids on Baghdad. It is as if those moments represent a stage where Iraq was insisting on staying alive at any cost, no matter what the consequences or injustice done.¹⁴³ This is another kernel event, which portrays the dramatic violent insanity of wartime in Iraq, heightened by the author's description of how out of character Tawfiq's action is. Through Tawfiq's version of the event, we grasp a sense of life-affirming inevitability and witness the change in his status, from a spectator in al-'Amil quarter - neither part of its community nor part of the one he left behind - to a fully active participant. Here we see the chronotope of the stairway marking his full initiation into this marginalised quarter:

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 334,377-380,387-392,394-397. For a further discussion of the life-affirming nature of love in Arabic Literature, see Miriam Cooke, "Death and Desire In Iraqi War Literature" in R. Allen et. al. (eds.), op.cit., pp. 184-185.

¹⁴³ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., pp. 334,389-392,396,397-401.

"I encircled her back with my arm and held her close. In a few seconds, the fear that was surging up in my heart was replaced with an enormous lustful desire. Her sobbing was very arousing. I could feel her warm body against mine, which gave me a chance to feel her nakedness underneath the flimsy dress she was wearing. I was mad with desire so that I felt a certain dizziness overriding any other feeling of the world around me. I held her and kissed her neck. I was surprised that I was so nervous and in one swift move I pulled down my pyjamas so that the lower parts of our bodies were intimately close. She was resting in my arms with her face leaning against my neck and her naked waist against mine while her legs opened for me. I was holding on to her oblivious of any other thing except for the burning frenzied hunger for penetrating her at any cost. She did not seem to mind or resist at first nor did she stop moaning. I felt her intimate area rubbing against mine. I then somehow managed to penetrate her properly; I grabbed her buttocks firmly and pulled them towards me. She let out a loud cry; I was inside her now and she was on top of me groaning and beating against my chest. I did not pay her any attention, and as the coitus continued my panting was getting louder and louder. She then started hitting my face and my head while screaming and howling incoherently: 'Oh no, no . . . I do not want to, I do not want to . . . oh no, You are mad!' I was hurt and confused; drifting in a tingling vague sexual hallucination. I was pressing her and kissing her breasts unheeding of her cries and protest. She was the only one in the world for me at that moment where I had nothing left to hold on to except the intense pleasure of this intimate fusion of our bodies heightened by the sweet delicious odour of her sweat and the tingling effect of her braids brushing on my face. This world was becoming an intense crescendo which I was holding tight, in spite of everything. Then . . . my soul hovered as I felt it departing my bruised body and a tide of joy came over me with the ejaculation of the life essence towards infinity - towards the point of no return."¹⁴⁴

The next paragraph begins, using the prolepsis technique, by showing us the difficulty that Tawfiq was facing in finding another place to live, which forces him to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 399. My translation.

ask his sister-in-law if he could stay in one of the rooms of her father's house for some time, but she had refused with the excuse that she intended to rent out the house. From Tawfiq's previous sentence, we are able to infer through analepsis, an event that has not yet been mentioned: known as the technique of ellipsis, that two days after he had raped her, Fathiyyah told him to leave her house as soon as possible in a very aggressive way. She did that after moving an old box containing some of her things from his room, as if in this way she was breaking the connections between her life and his. The writer's intention in using these three techniques - (prolepsis/ellipsis/analepsis) - is to accentuate the extent of the change that had taken place in Tawfiq's relationship with Fathiyyah. Tawfiq experiences the true meaning of humiliation when Fathiyyah decides to throw him out of her world. Tawfiq's situation is very bad at this time, after his loss of the only people who had always supported him, represented by the characters of Fathiyyah and her family. This makes him consider returning back to Khanaqin, since he had been completely abandoned by Baghdad this time, but he quickly changes his mind when he learns that life there is miserable because of the war. The only good thing that happens to him during this period is finding his diary, which also contained the lock of Adele's hair, behind the old box, which Fathiyyah had removed from his room. In finding them, Tawfiq feels that he had rediscovered a piece of himself and that he had found a part of the happy and difficult phases of his life in Iraq. In fact, in finding them he felt that he had found not only his own personal history but clues to the history of his nation. The diary and Adele's lock of hair, are a symbol of the historical records that had to be saved for coming generations to explain the profound social and political changes that were taking place in the country and enable them not to repeat old mistakes.¹⁴⁵

By chance, Tawfiq finds a room in another clamorous, bohemian quarter of Baghdad, called al-Mrabba'ah. He begins living his life there between its cafés, bakeries, stores

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 269,312,316,400-404,413. For further analysis of how static things in a novel can indicate the dynamic movement of time in a certain space, see: M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., p. 251 and W. J. Harvey, op.cit., pp. 30-39.

and markets. The only comfort that he finds in these places are their nearness to Hasan 'Ajami's Café, where he spends most of his time and the al-Haydar Khānah quarter which reminds him of his roots in the city. He also draws comfort from his thoughts of Fathiyyah who he begins to miss. He enjoys the company of Jāsim al-Ramaḍānī who frequents the same café and who agrees in an implied way that Tawfiq's miserable situation is the state of the majority of the people of Iraq, most of whom are homeless, unhappy and poor, especially the country's intellectuals. Such things make life bearable for Tawfiq, albeit in that uncomfortable quarter where Iran's nightly air raids on Baghdad were changing the physical features of the city: "I didn't sleep that night as usual . . . I stood behind my bedroom door, watching the smoke of the bombs in the sky."¹⁴⁶ This nightly bombardment made Tawfiq cling more to the Baghdad that he had known by visiting al-Haydar Khānah and recalling his memories of Adele.¹⁴⁷

A month later, Tawfiq decides to go to visit Fathiyyah, to ask for her forgiveness. He meets her mother who is alone in the house and she tells him that Ghassān is angry with Fathiyyah for letting him, Tawfiq, leave without asking him for his address. Fathiyyah's mother also informs Tawfiq that Ghassān's troop had been ordered to move to an unknown location on the front line. As Tawfiq is leaving the house he meets Fathiyyah on the same steps where he had raped her, but this time he asks her to forgive him for the harm that he had done to her in that very place. Those steps witness the stages of development in Tawfiq's relationship with Fathiyyah. She asks him to stand by her during her ordeal and he promises her that he would do so. He goes to Ghassān's father to ask him if he knew anything about what his son had told Fathiyyah and her parents, but it seems that the father had no idea. So he goes to his favourite café and as he is sitting there he suddenly realises that what Fathiyyah meant by her ordeal was more than Ghassān's being on the front line, especially since she had looked very pale. He realises that she might be pregnant. He goes to her to find out if this is true and discovered that it

¹⁴⁶ *Al-Māsarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 409.

is. During those moments after he learns Fathiyyah's secret, he feels that his city, Baghdad, has changed its comforting features and become a battlefield, not only politically, but also from a social aspect: "the streets of Baghdad, with the cold weather, the climate of war and the night raids, are dark and empty."¹⁴⁸ The city assumes the right to condemn a woman like Fathiyyah without taking into consideration all the difficult circumstances that she had been through. During those days Tawfiq and Fathiyyah's relationship becomes one of sincere affection. Tawfiq gradually learns that Fathiyyah is not the type who can give herself to more than one man at a time.¹⁴⁹

The war was creating fear in the lives of the people. Kāsib had to join the army and Anwār went to be with him, but because of the change that appeared in his attitude that led him to neglect her, she decided to return to Baghdad. 'Abd al-Bārī was worried that his sons would be conscripted and even Ghassān did not come home on leave to visit Tawfiq, Fathiyyah and her parents, and to celebrate the end of the year 1980 with them. Although the Iraqi army was advancing and everyone hoped that Iraq would win the war soon, there was still an overhanging sense of despair in most Iraqis that the war would never end. Tawfiq's dream about the destruction and death that was spreading throughout the city could be a window on the true feelings of the Iraqi people and could also be a premonition that the war would continue for a long time. During this time another confrontation takes place between Tawfiq and Anwār, which emphasises Anwār's rejection of him. In fact, this time her rejection is humiliating because she insults him. Her conversation with him emphasises the previous view expressed in this study about difficult relationship of the Kurds with Iraq, because of the political, social and ethnic obstacles that they encountered within Iraq. In giving up her love for Tawfiq,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 404-411.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 415.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 397, 411-416, 419-420. For further discussion of the way that relationships between characters change in times of chaotic, urban change and how the city becomes an arena for cultural conflict, see: Franco Moretti, *op.cit.*, pp. 13-24; David Ignatow, "Living with Change" and Marge Piercy, "The City as Battle ground: The Novelist as Combatant" in Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 193-207; 209-210.

Anwār exemplifies the attitude of her own people towards Iraq, having suffered such oppression. Another important event occurs at the same time, helping Tawfiq to become more aware of the state of society in Baghdad. While he was in Ḥasan 'Ajamī's Café, he again meets Jāsim al-Ramaḍānī who, even though he himself partially belonged to the materialistic class through trying to benefit from it as much as possible, was able to view that class with some perspective and tells Tawfiq how it manages to get whatever it aims for, e.g. the secret of Salmān al-Qaṣṣābī's wealth, that Kamīlah's pregnancy was not natural but through In-Vetro-Fertilisation and the argument over the money that Salmān al-Qaṣṣābī left to Jāsim al-Ramaḍānī. He also exposes the extent to which that class is mentally abnormal and physically deviant. These revelations do not surprise Tawfiq as much as confirm his existing beliefs.

An important item of news breaks into Tawfiq's cold life the next morning when he hears from one of his neighbours that Ghassān and Faṭḥiyyah had come to his home looking for him the day before. Tawfiq rushes to Faṭḥiyyah, who told him that Ghassān had only had a short leave, which meant that he had had to go back to the front the same day. She told him about Ghassān's feeling that his troop was about to be moved closer to the Iranian border. Tawfiq asked her about Ghassān's attitude towards her pregnancy, and she told him that he knew about it and accepted it. She also told him that he had already told his father about her and that he wanted to see Tawfiq urgently to talk with him about some important issues before they all meet with Ghassān's father. Tawfiq feels that Faṭḥiyyah and Ghassān's relationship was taking an ambiguous course and he senses that she too is uneasy, although she tries to hide it. The tenuous circumstances in which Ghassān and Faṭḥiyyah's love sustains itself is indicative of the impossible pressures exerted on the young at that time, illustrating a climate that conspired to destroy all that was fertile.

Tawfiq feels a desire to commit suicide if Iraq and its people did not rise up in rage, as the Iraqi poet Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb once wished in his famous poem *Unshūdat al-*

Maṭar - to change the afflicted present of their world. It is an ugly world that made a close relationship such as Faṭḥiyyah's and Ghassān's likely to have an uncertain end. That distorted world in Iraq forced most of the helpless people of the country to adhere to their fatalistic religious faith, which allowed them to offer their children such as Ghassān and 'Abd al-Bārī's sons, as sacrifices for the mistakes of the ruling regime. That marred world, which was constructing its foundations in Iraq, did so not only on the blood of Iraqis but also by asphyxiating the talents and gifts of the people such in case of the intellectual Abū al-Adab, for example. The only flicker of happiness that Tawfiq feels during these days is when Faṭḥiyyah suddenly comes to his untidy refuge, where he had isolated himself for ten days as if under siege.

The relationship between Tawfiq and Faṭḥiyyah becomes intimate because his presence is very important in giving her some sense of security. Tawfiq begins to see her true personality that he had not recognised in the past and this causes him to fall deeply in love with her and to feel as if she is his wife. Tawfiq's love for Faṭḥiyyah makes him long to reveal his real feelings towards her, which of course he cannot do out of respect for her relationship with Ghassān who he considers almost as his own son. He is also conscious of the age difference between them, which makes the development of a relationship between them unsuitable, especially since he does not want her to suffer the same trauma with him that she had undergone with her husband. So Tawfiq and Faṭḥiyyah stand at the threshold of a new stage in their relationship. Tawfiq needs the true love of a strong and faithful woman like Faṭḥiyyah. As for Faṭḥiyyah, her love for Ghassān does not stop, but she needs Tawfiq's psychological support during that difficult time. She feels that without Tawfiq, she cannot face her future in her new condition and Tawfiq understands this, which allows him to accept his new role in her life without expecting any kind of mental or even emotional reward from her.

It was on a Friday morning at the end of February 1981 that Tawfiq learns by chance from Najdiyyah, while at his brother's house, that Ghassān had died in the front line ten

days ago. It is as if this news does not have any particular meaning because of the vast numbers of young men who were being killed in the war at the time. Tawfiq is shocked and goes to see Ghassān's father, who is his brother's neighbour. Tawfiq discovers that, like most of the people of Iraq, Ghassān's father is clinging on to his fatalistic religious faith, which made him more capable of accepting the reality of the loss of his son, in that mad war, more readily. Ghassān's father gives Tawfiq a small green suitcase, which Ghassān had left for his stepmother Sundus to give to him. Tawfiq assumes that it contains books that he lent to Ghassān. Tawfiq's collapse over this shocking news begins as soon as he leaves Ghassān's father's house. He avoids going to see Fathiyyah that day because he does not know how to face her with the tragic news, especially since he had realised during the visit to Ghassān's father that Ghassān had not told his father anything about Fathiyyah. The author uses the technique of stretched scenes in the two following events to show the degree of shock that Fathiyyah feels the next day when Tawfiq informs her of Ghassān's death, especially when she learns that Ghassān's family did not know of her existence. She collapses and considers either meeting his family or of having an abortion. Tawfiq rejects both solutions because they would threaten either her reputation or her life. The death of Ghassān and Fathiyyah's pregnancy bring Tawfiq and Fathiyyah close together. She cannot now exist without him and he cannot give up his responsibility towards her so their lives become united.

Tawfiq knows that Fathiyyah's suggestions of meeting Ghassān's father or having an abortion were a way of defending her own existence and he cannot blame her for this. Although Tawfiq knows that he is the last hope that Fathiyyah has to survive with dignity, he does not want to be committed to a marital relationship with her, despite his deep love for her. The reason for this is his insolvency that forces him to live the life of a vagabond. He is incapable of offering her a stable life and refuses to be the partner that takes more than he can offer, as had happened in his first marriage. He enters his cold shabby room filled with confusion and pain, then suddenly he sees the small green

suitcase that Ghassān had left him. Thinking Ghassān may have left him a written note, Tawfiq opens the suitcase.

The next paragraph begins with an ellipsis; we are not at first told what Tawfiq finds in the suitcase that Ghassān had left him. The author also uses the technique of prolepsis here. The paragraph begins with Tawfiq describing how the streets of Baghdad and their natural features looked at dawn. Tawfiq feels that he had been given a new start in the flow of time in that city, a new birth, a new way of life and new choices to make. Everything in Baghdad at that moment appears as if it is being created anew, just as Tawfiq feels. Tawfiq decides to return to his room, where, through the analepsis technique, we learn that Ghassān had left him fifty thousand dinars:

"I entered my room and locked the door. I took out the green suitcase very carefully from underneath the pile of books where I hid it before I went out. I sat on my bed and opened it. The contents of the suitcase were still the same as when I had first opened it a few hours earlier. There were carefully arranged rolls of dinar notes all neatly bound with ribbons. I counted them; there were fifty thousand dinars. Ghassān's father told me that the suitcase was all rightfully mine, that Ghassān had left it for me and asked his mother to deliver it to me and that they did not know what was in it. And that was all, no further explanations, not a single word! I emptied the case, turned it upside down and on its sides, tapped it and searched through every corner but could not find that scrap of paper I have been promising myself. And once again I found myself between the huge jaws of fate, expected to provide answers I did not have because I was still filled with questions myself and compelled to dig up the right answers. Oh what a farce this bloody age is!"¹⁵⁰

It seems that al-Takarī used the three techniques mentioned here to end the story of the novel with an unexpected surprise after it had reached its highest level of suspense.

¹⁵⁰ *Al-Masarrāt wal Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 462. My translation.

After sleeping for a little while, Tawfiq awakens and light and life seem to fill his room. He opens the door of his room to face the whole universe of Iraq, deciding to step away from his past there and then:

"The glorious sun was kissing my eyes as I woke up in my sunlit room. I felt a strange pain in my side so I changed my position and pushed the suitcase away to the other side of the bed. My whole body was aching but I felt an inexplicable feeling of bliss and serenity of the spirit. I rose slowly and stood up and began stretching my arms and legs for a while. I then pushed the door wide open and let in the golden rays and the fresh and crisp spring breeze and inhaled deeply."¹⁵¹

He was now certain that he and Ghassān are almost a single being, as they had merged together during the difficult period that Iraq was going through. This means he must do what Ghassān would have done if he were still alive, and that is what is the best for Ghassān in his absence, for Fathiyyah and for himself.¹⁵² This is why Tawfiq describes his relationship with Ghassān in a such intimate spiritual way by saying: "as long as I am empowered by the certainty that both Ghassān and I lived emotionally and mentally united through troubled times; I must realise eventually what he intended me to do for him and what I must do for her sake and for mine!"¹⁵³

Ghassān's entry into Tawfiq's life is considered by this study to be a kernel event because of its symbolic meaning. Ghassān's generation was the generation that gave its own life for its country, symbolised by Tawfiq, and enriched Iraq by all that it had, so that the rest of the nation could find hope in a new and strong beginning, ending the era of sterility that Baghdad and the rest of the country were sinking under. Ghassān's generation was the generation that had to give up its life at the time of its country's tribulation, as indicated by Thurayyā's conversation with Tawfiq about the sunset, as well as the conversation between Ghassān and Tawfiq about war, death and God in

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 464. My translation.

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 463-464.

Tolstoy and Dostoevsky's novels, so that its coming descendants could have a brighter future in a more developed and stronger country, fused together through adversity. Fathiyyah is the other character who belongs to Ghassān's generation and she has to continue their role by embracing Iraq during its ordeal and trying to give it a healthier progeny. The last three pages of the novel are quotations from famous authors and philosophers that assert the fact of man's strength in spite of all the catastrophes that confront him. They also assert the importance of finding true love and true friendship despite the complications that beset human relationships. These quotations succinctly encapsulate the theme of *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

The importance of this novel is derived from its epic range. It deals with the story of social and political human evolution, in one of the most ancient places in the world. Because Iraq is part of the larger Arab world, the novel's themes extend their relevance to the 20th century Arab struggle against western imperialism and corrupt regimes.¹⁵⁵ The novel depicts the suffering of Iraq at the hands of a group of opportunists from among its own people, who disrupted and quashed the hopes of a whole nation for dignified independence. This notion is well depicted through Tawfiq's relationship with Kamīlah and how she undermined his relationship with Adele by destroying her letters. It also describes the way in which that class raped their country in the name of modernity and encouraged violence as a substitute for culture, as the imprisonment and beating of Tawfiq illustrate.¹⁵⁶ The experience of prison and torture was "the beginning of a new story, the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 464. My translation.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 317, 331-354, 464-467.

¹⁵⁵ For further discussion, see Šabirī Ḥafīz, "Riwayāt al-Takarlī al-Jadīdah 'al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'": Riwayāt al-Masarrāt al-Insāniyyah al-Qalīlah wal-Awjā' al-'Arabiyyah al-Kathīrah", op.cit., pp. 14-15.

¹⁵⁶ *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, op.cit., p. 250. For a detailed discussion of torture, see Elaine Scarry, op.cit., pp. 27-59.

his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life.”¹⁵⁷ In the end, it is the love, goodwill and responsibility of the oppressed (Ghassān), together with the individual agency and shirking of negative social values (Tawfiq), which enables a positive outcome in this final part of the trilogy. The protagonist is able to take responsibility for Fathiyyah’s pregnancy without caring, whether the baby is Ghassān’s or his own since both the young man and the protagonist had undergone the same difficult experiences in Iraq at that time, which cause them to fuse in spirit.

This novel attempts to map the components that have shaped modern Iraq where the protagonist mirrors the soul and the spirit of that nation, showing its people’s desire to live together valuing the rich heritage of that past, it is as Ernest Renan said:

“A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, One in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an individual form . . . The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more - these are the essential conditions for being a people.”¹⁵⁸

If there is a message or truth contained in its fabula, it is the imperative of admitting one’s mistakes and questioning one’s values. *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā’* is a novel that could almost be considered an epic that narrates the story of a whole nation through the different periods of its history, not purely for the sake of pleasure, but for the sake of the

¹⁵⁷ Vincenzo Ruggiero, op.cit., p. 199.

self-discovery that will help in constructing a better future from the ruins of their suffering.

In this novel al-Takarlī deals with the same subjects that he raised in *al-Rajʿ al-Baʿid* and in *Khātām al-Raml*. He shows how the Baʿth Party changed the historical and the cultural map of Baghdad in a way that affected the social and the psychological life of all the Iraqis, making it clear that the only aim behind such a step was the Party's own political and economical benefits. He also manifests through the genre's technique that the most important aim for the Party was to achieve total control on the Iraqi character by plucking it out of its own authentic roots and deforming its identity. Al-Takarlī does that in this novel by exposing the whole of Iraq's contemporary history, relating all its different areas to Baghdad (North/South), which was the epicentre where the main conflicts between the Party and the patriotic part of the nation took place.

In *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjāʿ* the writer emphasises on the idea of the cultural malformation that happened to the map of modern Baghdad, which resulted in the defacement of the Iraqi identity. Still, in this novel the fate of the protagonist Tawfiq differs from that of Midhat and Hāshim. He does not end up dead like them and he tries to understand and absorb the historical and political situation of his country. In other words, he tries consciously to learn from his mistakes and to forgive. The writer gives us the sense that this step might be achieved in a slow way by Tawfiq. But by the end of the novel we have a kind of a feeble glimmer of hope that it might be a progressive step that would lead to the return of Baghdad's authenticity one day.

¹⁵⁸ For more on the definition of 'nation', see Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation" in *Nation and Narration*, translated by Martin Thom and edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London/New York, Routledge, 2000), p. 8-22.

Conclusion

Urban Space: Politics and Identity in Narrative

Fiction

This study has examined al-Takarlı's techniques for essentially demonstrating the same theme - the crushing of the Iraqi character because of the prevalent political system in the country. Through considering a number of theoretical perspectives, it has shown how the author creates a testimony to the tumultuous contemporary history of Iraq through a number of allegorical perspectives. The kind of tragedy relayed in these novels arises from a fundamental conflict of interests between the individual, his community and the state. At its root is often the abstract conflict between 'heritage' and 'progress'. Each of the trilogy's protagonists has to show a fighting spirit to overcome the difficulties of their lives or else be destroyed by them.¹ The eventual resolution of the tragedy that runs through the novels is achieved by "attest[ing] the triumph of the human soul over suffering and disaster,"² as it is finally portrayed at the end of the third novel, *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*. The study demonstrates that the trilogy, together, forms an important historical record that documents the social and psychological face of Iraq's political upheavals and the grappling of Baghdadis with their modern state.

The city is the embodiment of the development or decline of a civilisation. Its features reflect the vicissitudes of its political, economic, cultural and social fate. The life of the individuals within it shape and are shaped by its streets, its vistas and its architecture. Changes in a cityscape can take place over long or short spans of time, naturally or imposed by human hand.³

¹ For further analysis of the role of the hero in tragedy, see Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of The Tragic* (Malden/Oxford/Melbourne, Blackwell, 2003), pp. 25,76.

² Ibid., p. 25.

³ For a discussion of the impact of politics on landscape, see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London/New York, Routledge 1983), p. 1-88.

In the novel, these changes often take on a symbolic significance. The most important aim of the novelist is to show in his literary work the extent of the accommodation or dysfunction that the passage of time has in the novel. Changes that occur within a short period of time greatly impacts the individual's life directly, whereas changes that occur slowly over a long period of time impact the social group, which in turn impacts the individual in a specific place at a specific time.⁴ In literature, the city becomes a state of mind, which is reflected in the behaviour of the individuals who live in it. Al-Takarlī portrays human nature as deeply connected to the city, which is externally organised in terms of the laws that dominate our lives.⁵ When that external organisation becomes corrupt and fails to facilitate just social relations, people's perceptions of the city change and the city itself can become fragmented physically, reflecting and reinforcing created divisions between communal identities.

Al-Takarlī is interested in the individual's character within the social and political order, and so he shows his protagonists as both conditioned by and in battle with the overarching authorities - moral, traditional and political - of their day. In al-Takarlī's trilogy, the city provides a metaphor for all the dichotomies of modern life: authority and insurrection; tradition and modernity; belonging and alienation; domestic and public; spirituality and materialism. It becomes a field of battle, where each part of the city is representative of an era and "each era offer[s] us an urban identity that reveal[s] our secret cultural values."⁶

In fact such experience can only be expressed through the novel, because of its nature as a heterogeneous genre with its different parts connected to each other in an organised way. It is dependent on the sequence of events that are formed through the interaction of

⁴ For further discussion on this point, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. I, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 101-107, 134, 139, 158, 162.

⁵ For a detailed exposition of this dynamic, see Richard Lehan, *The City In Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1998), pp. 6-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the individual with the circumstances that influence the group, to which he is related and by which he is influenced.⁷

This aim is achieved through al-Takarli's simple style of writing which favours direct speech and stream of consciousness. It could be argued, as discussed by David Lodge in *Language of Fiction*, that a content of a novel is more important than its form, and that:

"Life, not language, is the novelist's medium: that it is the way he manipulates and organises and evaluates the life or, more precisely, the imitation-life of his fictions, that constitutes his literary activity; that his language is merely a transparent window through which the reader regards this life-the writer's responsibility being merely to keep the glass clean. The function of the critic then becomes that of discerning and assessing the quality of life in a given novel-the plausibility and interest of its characters and their actions, and the nature of its moral discrimination and values."⁸

The importance of al-Takarli's three sequenced novels can be discerned chiefly through the relevance of his characters to twentieth century Iraqi society. The narrative is thus physically and chronologically bound, and in order to assess the nature of its moral discrimination and values, we must consider the time and places that his characters occupy as much as the characters themselves.

This thesis argues that the polyphony of al-Takarli's trilogy is created not only by the characters, who are representative of certain contemporary social groups or geographical territory, but by the urban and domestic settings themselves, which are dynamic and, at times, in competition with one another and their inhabitants. Each novel regards the city as an active participant in the action. It is not a blank parchment on which the story is written, but a palimpsest - with its traces of history, embodiments of morality and symbols of faith. The combinations, juxtapositions and radical effacements that take

⁷ For further discussion about the novel's theory, see Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*, translated by Anna Bostock (Cambridge/Massachusetts, The Mit Press, 1999), pp. 75-83,120-126.

place in the city, are used to highlight ironies, hypocrisies, perversions and transformations in contemporary urban life.⁹

"[T]he city is and has always been, a place of darkness and light, sin and salvation, barbarism and culture. But despite this constancy in imaginative approaches to the city, something changes as well. One way to account for such change is by examining the material and social changes that give rise to the imaginative responses."¹⁰

Al-Takarlı's response is subtly different in each novel, formed by the social changes he had witnessed and the growing complexity of the reality he wished to express.

Underpinning al-Takarlı's narrative landscape is the inside/outside dichotomy. The map that the novels draw is one of private and public domains, social and political lives, and psychological and cultural changes. In revealing the points of contact between the two worlds, al-Takarlı shows how each affects the other. This is why the chronotope of the threshold and the road are so important.

Al-Takarlı's novels are fraught with friction, separation and fragmentation. He uses the imagery of the city to highlight the dangers of disunity. Where communities are displaced from their historic roots, material wealth is severed from culture and political power exerts itself without societal consent, life becomes hypocritical and prone to violence. The protagonists of these novels are each cast as mediators between the private and public sphere. This chapter will draw together the features of the city common to all three novels, highlighting the significance of changes in their relationship with the characters. It will identify trends or patterns in these relationships, which will help to elucidate the author's ideological intent in compiling the trilogy.

⁸ David Lodge, *Language of Fiction* (London/New York, Routledge, 2001), pp. 5-6.

⁹ For further discussion, see Richard Lehan, *op.cit.*, pp. 4, 6.

¹⁰ Joseph McLaughlin, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

Urban Space and Inner Transformation

Exterior life in Iraq affected the interior private life of the whole nation both as groups and as individuals.¹¹ In the three novels analysed in this study, al-Takarlī connects the political problems that are affecting the social life of the people in Iraq with the tiniest details of their private lives. Al-Takarlī's success as a writer stems from his ability to artfully express a common phenomenon in the Arab world: the oppression of a nation, caught in a vice between destructive social norms and a totalitarian political regime.¹²

Any place or space is naturally connected to a historical time; the fragmentation of that time in that place is the real experience that leads to the transformation of the self.¹³ Usually cities are the best places for observing the material action of such relationships between individuals and the canons, rules and values that are embodied in the complex structure of cultural life or have been imposed by the government for political, economic or social reasons. In literature, descriptions of the city reveal the nature of the relationship of a character with the value it represents during a certain historical period. In al-Takarlī's novels, we find that the development of character occurs through his encounter with all the aspects of its canons, his acceptance or rejection of which, helps in crystallising his identity. The reason for this is that the city imposes on its inhabitants a life order with which they have to engage in every moment of their lives, in order to be accepted as part of the community and thrive within it.¹⁴ Our identity as human beings starts forming in the home and comes to maturity with the cultural encounter and

¹¹ For more detailed information on this point, see Christopher Flint, *Family Fiction: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain (1688-1798)* (Stanford/California, Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 17.

¹² For further information, see 'Abd al-Rahmān Abū-'Uf, *Al-Khiṭāb al-Siyāsī* (Cairo, Markaz al-Qāhirah li-Dirāsāt Huqūq al-Insān, 1999), p. j.

¹³ For further discussion, see Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist-or a Short History of Identity" in *Question of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.) (London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi, Sage Publication, 2002), p. 25.

¹⁴ For further discussion of these ideas, see Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist-or a Short History of Identity"; Kevin Robins, "Interrupting Identities: Turkey-Europe"; Paul du Gay, "Organizing Identity: Entrepreneurial Governance and Public Management", all in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), op.cit., pp. 19-23, 68-70, 74-76, 151-162.

exchange that takes place outside of our clan. We then reveal our values by choosing associations other than our immediate family.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that it is the nation-state that completes us as human beings, providing the supra-identity we need to co-operate in a cohesive society, yet protecting our rights as individuals. The disintegration or fragmentation of any of these realms (the home, the city and the nation) can thus have deep and devastating effects on our sense of identity and therefore, our individual character. Identity is also affected by the relocation of an individual from one place to another. As we see in al-Takarli's novels, moving home can equally disorientate and alienate us from its strangeness or empower us with a sense of freedom/security/belonging that we may have lacked in our previous abode. As Hall says:

"The concept of identity . . . is . . . that collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificial imposed selves which a people with a shared history ancestry hold in common and which can stabilize, fix or guarantee an unchanging oneness or cultural belongingness underlying all the other superficial difference."¹⁵

This shared history and unchanging oneness is to be found represented in each novel by the old quarters of Baghdad. The government's drive to expropriate most of the houses in these old districts in the city belies its desire to eradicate the old identities and divide communities.

The novels focus on the short time-span in which the lives of educated individuals in the major cities of Iraq faced certain choices and challenges, their response to which would help define the path of the nation. Interaction between the protagonists of the three novels and certain places leads to the transformation of personality, usually through a process of self-realisation and recognition of identity: Midhat in the old and worn-out Kurdish quarter, where he realises the stupidity of tradition that condemns his

wife for having been raped; Hāshim in front of his family's old house in al-Aẓamiyyah where he feels security and warmth; Tawfiq in the old café al-'Ajamī near the old quarter of Ḥaydar Khānah where he was brought up and where he discovers the value of his friendship with Fathiyyah and his spiritual connection with Ghassan. Through the behaviour and fate of each protagonist in successive novels, al-Takarlī portrays the development from one period to another of the same type of person.

What is meant by transformation here is the different ways in which a character forms his other identity, depending on the nature of the relationships that connect him or her to other people during particular circumstances at a certain place and time. This means that this kind of development in the transformation of human personality is an endless process.¹⁶

The effect these transformations have on the plot relies on a combination of the characters' exercise of will as well as the geographical shape and the cultural structure of the country at that time.¹⁷ Al-Takarlī neither glorifies the past, as the early writers of Arabic novels did, nor does he have a partiality for any particular political ideology as some of the Arab nationalists had. Rather, he explores what happens when the past is ignored and effaced, yet its traditions left unquestioned in the new context. The final positive transformation of the protagonist Tawfiq in *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, is the result of the continuous and enduring interaction between the values of these two time frames and the different classes of society which are present throughout the three novels. It offers some hope that the Iraqi spirit (as portrayed in friendship, love and creativity) will triumph over the oppression and abuse of the system in which it is trapped. It is through the smaller individual changes (the rejection of cultural norms, the acceptance of one's own mistakes and the ability to forgive), rather than any bold political statement, that

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶ For further discussion, see Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?", *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

enable Tawfiq and Fathiyyah, at the end of *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, to show the potential for breaking the cycle of death and degradation of which Midhat in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, and Hāshim in *Khātam al-Raml* are victims of.

The cohesion and fusion between the characters and Baghdad is obvious in the way in which al-Takarī's characters interact with the events that befalls them in the high-ways, streets and alleys of the city. The location of an event always plays a significant role in its symbolic meaning. As Donald says:

"The big city offered a field of liberating possibilities. Here were the urban pleasures of squares and cafés, the chance encounters with strangers, the frisson of amorous adventure and political intrigue, the opportunity to make [our] reputation in the community of letters or the world of theatre. Its anonymity could be cruel, its dark zones could harbour hidden dangers, but the city at least allowed the space for self-formation and self-creation, for experimentation and change."¹⁸

In the trilogy, we sometimes sense that such a space is being restricted or distorted, and experimentation and change appear to come at a personal cost to the characters.

The Political Atlas of Iraq

The interest of this study lies in the social space that has been shaped by the events of contemporary history and which connects the past with the present moment. This study has shown, in the previous chapters, how the mapping of a city could be based on the conscious and the unconscious experience of its inhabitants. It has treated the city as "a network of narratives that we ourselves weave as we move through it."¹⁹ The idea of the

¹⁷ For further discussion on this point, see Paul Ricour, *Time and Narrative*, op.cit., Vol. 1, pp. 101-105,139.

¹⁸ James Donald, "The Citizen and the Man About Town" in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), op.cit., p. 182.

¹⁹ Dani Cavallaro, *Critical and Cultural Theory* (London/New Brunswick, The Athlone Press, 2001), p.175.

city as a "textual body"²⁰ is particularly appropriate to Iraq, emphasising both Baghdad's history as a literary capital at the time of the early Caliphs and the competing narratives of the country's people. Dominant narratives have, at times, undermined certain identities and reinforced or tried to create others. We see the Ba'th Party's physical dominance of the national narrative through its manipulation of geography to weaken opposition and enforce their political will. Al-Takarli's novels also show how people construct geographical reality through their movement from one place to another and the emotions that they invest in particular spaces. The process is two-way. From the very beginning, we see that the characters in each novel are both formed by their environs and form their personalities in resistance to, or collaboration with, the space that they find themselves in.

Al-Takarli's focus in each novel is indicative of the changing society and world-view of the characters. In *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, the main purview of action is inside the house, reflecting the importance of the family as the organisational building block of the state and guardian of its culture. In *Khātam al-Raml*, reflecting on the modernisation of the society of the 70s and 80s, the focus is on the displaced individual in the wider cityscape. The Ba'th party becomes the dominant social unit, its institutions holding power, rather than the heads of families and the city acts as the base of that power. Hāshim struggles to grasp this new reality and although he understands it in the end, he lacks the support of his community to be effective within it. In *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, we see the events pan out to include the rest of Iraq. This indicates the growing consciousness of a wider historical entity, in which human civilisation and culture had first flourished, and different ethnic and religious groups had both vied for territory and united against aggressors. This offers a potential inspiration for Iraq's rejuvenation, but also reflects the tightening, all-encompassing grip of the state bureaucracy and its attendant cultural malaise.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā' symbolically touches on the evolution of civilisation from the Sumerian civilisation that had sprung into being in the south of Iraq. This idea is emphasised by the unknown roots of 'Abd al-Mawlā and his generic description as if representing the first human beings. His beginnings in the south allude to the evolution and expansion of Mesopotamian civilisation. The unions and movement of the family mirror social relations and upheavals in twentieth century Iraq through the First and Second World Wars, the British mandate, the revolution of 'Abd al Karīm Qāsim and the rise of the Ba'th Party. Its relations with the Kurdish north and elements of the Ba'th Party are illustrative of the interconnected nature of groups in Iraq, contrary to the view of three distinct peoples.

In each of the three novels examined in this study, al-Takarlī expresses the complex conflicts confronting the Iraqi people through his choice of settings. His depiction of the capital, Baghdad, as the main locus of individual, and allegorical conflicts and contradictions belies the author's vision of his country as essentially urban. Even if his characters leave Baghdad, they are always drawn back to its centre, reinforcing the vision of a modern nation-state, with a capital city. The city itself is portrayed as a microcosm of the country and it is interesting to consider whether this, in fact, marginalises the large rural areas of Iraq and perhaps its spiritual and familial links between the South, Centre and North.

Death, Rebirth and Fertility: The Allegorical Nation

Death, fertility and rebirth are ever-present in al-Takarlī's novels, both at the level of the individual and with reference to the broader, national life. Rain symbolism features in all the novels, linking despair with the need to revive the nation.

In *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* the author reveals that he is using rain in the same way that the well known Iraqi poet, Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, used it in his famous poem *Unshūdat al-Maṭar*. The poem begins:

"Your eyes are two palm groves at the hour of dawn

Or two balconies from which the moon recedes.

When your eyes smile, vineyards leaf

And lights dance like moons in a river

Which an oar shakes at the hour of dawn

As if, in their depths, stars are throbbing."²¹

The poet talks about the unstable political situation in Iraq that has affected the economic, social and cultural life of the country.²² He uses several of the artistic techniques that are part of both ancient and modern Arabic poetry such as what might be seen as an *aṭlāl* and *nasīb* at the beginning of the poem, linking it to the Arabic heritage of the pre-Islamic *qasīdah*,²³ where "[t]he symbiotic union between the beloved and a certain geographical site is one of the recurring features of the opening of the classical qasida."²⁴ He draws on some of the stories in the Old Testament and the Qur'ān that deal with the ideas of death and resurrection and on the myth of Tammūz and 'Ishtār, which deals with the same ideas. The poet also uses a plurality of voices the Iraqi immigrants who are trying to sail across the Arabian Gulf, trying to find its way to salvation. The immigrants give a hopeful answer to the enquiries of the poet about the possibility of his nation's revival in the folk song that they chant while sailing. Despite the questions being expressed rather hopelessly, interspersing representations of the rich cultural

²¹ Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, "*Unshūdat al-Matar*", translated into English by Isa J. Boullatah in *Modern Arab Poets* (London, Heinemann, 1976), p. 7.

²² The poem is analysed by T. DeYoung, "A New Reading of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's 'Hymn of The Rain'" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 24, no. 1 (Leiden, Brill, 1993), p. 39.

²³ For further discussion, see T. DeYoung, op.cit., pp. 41-46.

²⁴ Sabry Hafez, "The Transformation of the Qasida Form in Modern Arabic Poetry" in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Vol. 1, Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle(eds.), consulting to the editors Nicholas Awde, (Leiden/New York/Koln, E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 110.

heritage of Iraq that has formed the identity of its nation might, therefore, result in its re-awakening, with depictions of disaster and starvation.²⁵

“The fluidity of the rain in the poem is associated with other fluids: tears and blood and more importantly with the perpetual flow of the cycle of life. The important factor in this association is its impact on the structure of the poem which conducts its rich interaction with both the qasida form (where rain and tears are associated with its *aṭlāl* section) and the *istisqā'* tradition (where the very act of hymn singing implies suffering under the prevalent drought and yearning for the rain as a source of life).”²⁶

The cultural heritage is symbolised in the religious quotations and those that refer to the myth of Tammūz, as well as references to the long rich essence of the Arabic heritage in Iraq that is represented in the technique of *al-aṭlāl* and *al-nasīb*. Apart from the hopeful reply of the immigrants and the rich cultural heritage that forms the Iraqi identity, the poet prefers to leave his poem open-ended, which indicates that although the salvation of his nation has to come one day, that day cannot be predicted, and it will not be very soon, because of the difficulty of achieving Iraq's salvation.²⁷

Al-Takarlī uses the symbol of rain to emphasise the same ideas that al-Sayyāb does in his poem. However, as a novelist, he does this by representing his country's situation through the ideas that are epitomised within the protagonists and the other characters, and by enabling them to interact with each other and with the unstable circumstances and events that surround them. He also stresses the importance of the notion of the Mesopotamian cultural heritage which forms the authentic Iraqi identity through drawing parallels between his protagonists and the myth of Tammūz, who dies in order to fertilise the barren earth of Iraq through his annual rebirth. This is evident in the way in which Midḥat and Hāshim encounter their fate at the end of the first and second novels. This is, of course, after observing that the protagonist of the second novel is a

²⁵ For further discussion, see T. DeYoung, *op.cit.*, pp. 39-59.

²⁶ Sabry Hafez, “The transformation of the Qasida Form in Modern Arabic Poetry”, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

developed reincarnation of the protagonist of the first novel. Tawfiq in the third novel is yet another reincarnation, but he has a different fate and continues to live with a faint glimmer of hope for a better life for Iraq and its people, after the salvation that must one day take place in Iraq. But the writer does not predict the time of this salvation, leaving the ending of his third novel open, as if to reinforce the idea adopted by al-Sayyāb in *Unshūdat al-Maṭar*. So al-Takarlī may have been influenced by al-Sayyāb's idea, which offers hope for the eventual strong revival of the Iraqi nation - the symbol of rain itself indicates this - that would grant life to Iraq out of death. Both authors show that this step will be achieved as a consequence of their nation preserving its rich historical heritage against all the damaging negative aspects of their lives, but this idea does not predict whether that day will be in the near future. In fact, by the way they end their literary works, both authors indirectly hint that it will not be achieved very soon. So the myth of Tammūz for both al-Sayyāb and al-Takarlī is, according to Salama:

"used as raw material to solidify ideas and attitudes in order to provide some sort of intellectual security . . . The assumption is that when literature stages myth and presents it from various perspectives, it does so not to invoke or allegorize its content through the letter, but rather to interrupt it. Myth may serve as a focus of an ethical idea of self-transcendence or self-sacrifice or of any other idea that needs to be justified. But when a literary text refers to myth, or rewrites myth, this does not mean that literature brings a dead myth back to life. For myth never dies, it rather dies down, like a communal value-consensus, and the only thing that literature could do is stir and interrupt it, thus contributing to better understanding of the variety of fundamental choices open to any given human community."²⁸

²⁷ For further discussion, see T. DeYoung, op.cit., pp. 39-61.

²⁸ Mohammad Ramadan Salama, "The Interruption of Myth: A Nancian Reading of Blanchot and Al-Bayati" in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Leiden, Brill, 2002), p. 249.

When a myth is linked to a literary text, the literary text tends to become a reading of a certain nation's cultural identity,²⁹ as we can see in the case of al-Sayyāb and al-Takarlī and the rain here becomes a symbol of both death and resurrection.³⁰

In *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, Midḥat is the litmus test for the moral and physical destruction that unexpectedly enters Baghdad from the north of the country during the early sixties. His death, the death of a moral intellectual at the start of the Ba'th revolution, augers ill for life under the new regime. The social study of life under the Ba'th and the themes opened up by *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*, progress in *Khātam al-Raml*. Hāshim, the protagonist of *Khātam al-Raml* tries to address the same destruction that killed Midḥat and which had been prevalent from the early sixties until 1984, the year of the events that take place in the second novel, concentrated in Baghdad because it is the heart of the country. This continuation of struggle suggests that Hāshim is the reincarnation of Midḥat, who is being given a second chance.

After the Ba'th Party's consolidation of its power in the northern area, symbolised by Baqubah in the previous novel, it moved rapidly to dominate Baghdad. At this point, we see Hāshim battling the outward manifestations of the Ba'th party rule. His death beside the offices of his company in 1984 represents the Ba'th's shattering of all the dreams of that promising generation. He is killed on the street, which emphasises the humiliation and the degradation that had been inflicted upon the Iraqi citizen from the very beginning of the Ba'th era, from Fu'ād's death in 1962 and the death of Midḥat in 1963.

Al-Takarlī's third novel, *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, may be regarded as the most important novel because it deals with the same theme as the first two, but over a much wider range of time and space. It allows us to see clearly, through the chronological arrangement of events, how history has left deep traces on the lives of the people who

²⁹ For further information, see Mohammad Ramadan Salama, op.cit., p. 280.

³⁰ Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 164-165.

live in different parts of Iraq. Every event in *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* succeeds in deepening the theme of the earlier novels.

Its protagonist, Tawfiq, can be easily recognised as symbolising the intellectual heritage that forms his identity as an Iraqi and Arab and affects the way he interacts with contemporary political events in his country. He also symbolises the modern Iraq that is trying to develop into a better state, despite all the political and social obstacles that it faces. Tawfiq's role as representing both the modern forward-looking Iraqi world-view and embodying his country's link to its heritage is compounded by two details: his birth in 1932 - the year that Iraq became a member of the League of Nations³¹ - and his upbringing in the historic old quarter of Ḥaydar-Khānah in the centre of Baghdad, close to both Bāb al-Shayk and al-Aẓamiyyah, the quarters that are mentioned in the earlier two novels.

The idea of procreation/renewal is reflected in the descriptions of characters' interaction with the space around them. For example, Baghdad is always split in two; the penetration and violation of certain old parts of the city - especially those given womb-like significance as the dark corners of the protagonists' retreat - and the use of thresholds as places where significant transformational activity occurs. This idea is also strong and concurs with inhospitable environs. In the new houses for example, where Ḥāshim and Tawfiq feel powerless and in the dilapidated Kurdish quarter where Ḥusāin feels debilitated and cannot respond to life around him.

Sexual potency can also be seen as a metaphor for national strength and regeneration as well as unification of Iraq's divergent groups, such as in Tawfiq's love affair with Adele; Tawfiq's love affair with Fathiyyah; and Ghassān's love affair with Fathiyyah.

Al-Takarlī inverses the conventional Arabic poetic personification of land as female by portraying women as an allegory for their country and men as humankind, the culture and civilisation that they produce is dependent on a respectful and compassionate union

between the two. The author deviates from this usual formula in *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* by using the protagonist Tawfiq to represent both contemporary Iraq and the nation.

Baghdad: A Tale of Two Cities

Baghdad has always been split in two by its river, the Tigris. One half is named al-Raṣāfah, the other al-Karkh. Historically, there was not much difference between the lifestyles of the inhabitants of these two areas, but with the rise of the Ba'th, al-Karkh became associated with the educated middle class and al-Raṣāfah with the poorer, less enfranchised section of Baghdad society. Each side of the river can be seen to stand for, or contrast with, the attitudes and ways of social behaviour, which form their cultural experience and, therefore, their cultural identity during the various periods of their history. This is apparent in 'Abd al-Karīm's discussion with Fu'ād about the woman with whom Fu'ād is in love, Hāshim's discussions with his uncle Ra'ūf and his thoughts while driving through Baghdad, and Tawfiq's reflections on the river while walking the streets of Baghdad.³² All these events not only show the differences between the social classes in the city, but also the extent of the architectural changes that had taken place there, damaging its heritage at the hands of an appalling political regime that wanted to build a new Baghdad which it could dominate.

In al-Takarlī novels, the city is divided in another way: the old quarters, in which the old families of the city were established, representing the traditional order, values and culture of the country; and the 'redeveloped' areas, which appear character-less and lack real communities. Gradually, the new or appropriated areas become those which represent the canon or official order of society, the old quarters are left to decline or undergo reconstruction.

³¹ Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs* (Penguin, London, 1985), p. 200.

³² For further discussion, see Kevin Robins, "Interrupting Identity: Turkey-Europe" and Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist-or a Short History of Identity," *op.cit.*, pp. 23-25,82 and Michael Ferber, *op.cit.*, pp. 170-172.

In each novel, there is also a marginalised, bohemian quarter, dilapidated and full of society's outcasts. Throughout the trilogy we perceive a reversal in the significance of these areas. From the Kurdish quarter in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* as an omen of the moral decay and government oppression to come, to Hay al-'Amil and al-Mrabba'ah quarter in *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, whose ad-hoc order and unpretentious inhabitants offer hope where all other options have been exhausted.

When Midhat was staying with Husayn in the Kurdish quarter just before the Ba'th revolution breaks out, he realises the dangerous course along which Iraq is being propelled. His experience in the Kurdish quarter leads him to discover the real cause of the dramatic and detrimental changes coursing the country: the decadence of the declining political regime and the ascendancy of the Ba'th Party. He sees there is conflict between the political parties, a weak, crumbling leadership and a disintegrating social culture. This perspective allows Midhat to realise that he could reject these things without it affecting his loyalty to his country just as he decides to return to Munirah, who, like Iraq, would always be pure and virtuous, no matter how the treacherous tried to contaminate her. His random death at the outbreak of the Ba'thist revolution and the destruction of the Kurdish quarter signal the city's descent into a dark era, in which the young intellectual class would suffer, the lives of Iraqi citizens would be worthless, and a future of sectarian oppression lay ahead.

In *Khātam al-Raml* the journey of Hāshim against the Ba'th and their plan to change the historical, social and cultural map of Baghdad through changing the features of the old quarters in al-Azamiyyah, his birth-place, and through deconstructing his relationship with his wife, Amāl, is the same journey that Midhat begins in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*. His sudden death in one of Baghdad's streets indicates the same failure as the death of Midhat.

Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā' depicts an intrusive and parasitic social class that starts to emerge in parts of the city during the seventies and the eighties. This is embodied by the

family of al-Qaṣṣābī. The impact of this class on the original people of these areas is illustrated in the way that al-Qaṣṣābī's family infiltrate protagonist's family and appropriate their property and their spirit from them. Such people, represented by al-Qaṣṣābī's friends, began to spread throughout Baghdad, benefiting from the unstable political situation. The coming to power of the Ba'th Party embraced these types who fitted into, and helped create its networks of patronage sealed by vested interests as the new elites.

Thus, it is inevitable that the exhausted representatives of the true Iraq and its people - Tawfiq and Fathiyyah - should end up in a marginalised part of Baghdad. Such areas still existed in the city, because although they were exploited they were not redeveloped. Despite the chaos and poverty in those parts of the city, Tawfiq finds, there, all the tenderness that was lacking in those parts dominated by the government and the class it had co-opted. Tawfiq also remains attached to his origins in Baghdad, and stays faithful to the family house in its old quarter by always visiting it, just as Hāshim did in *Khātām al-Raml*. This is portrayed as an act of resistance to the malicious redevelopment policy and to all that the government stands for. Tawfiq begins to open himself up more and more to life in Ḥay al-'Amil, and to be a part of its simple reality that offered a more genuine existence than the other parts of the city in which he had lived. The markets of al-Afrāḥ in Ḥay al-'Amil, in addition to the quarter of al-Ḥaydar Khānah, became a focus of the protagonist's life in the novel.

This acceptance by Tawfiq of Fathiyyah's anarchic society in Baghdad, makes him feel capable of procreating in that society, indicated by his rape of Fathiyyah. Iraq and all its people were searching for a new beginning in life and the motivation to live, but their years of oppression and abuse lead to desperate and violent expressions of this desire. Fathiyyah's pregnancy and the money that Ghassān had left to him represent the new beginning that Tawfiq was searching for. So Tawfiq discovers the truth in al-Mrabba'ah, another tumultuous quarter of Baghdad, where he at last decides to make a

positive move against the destruction, corruption, and death rife at the time of the first Gulf War. Tawfiq's hope of carving out a bright new life in the midst of all the misery in Iraq comes through his recognition of the city's true beauty in that disordered part of Baghdad. This, like Midhat's realisation in the Kurdish quarter, reveals that he has re-conceptualised the world from this marginalised perspective and become able to distinguish what is of real value from what is superficial.

Inside/Outside: The Dichotomy of Space

Resistance to the Iraqi government and those who represent its materialistic, banal ideology is shown to depend on individuals being directly connected to some concrete manifestation of the city's authenticity. As Bachelard asserts, the strongest of all concrete entities associated with preserving identity during times of instability is that of the house. We have examined how the house features heavily in each of the three novels, symbolising different things at different times. An overview of the trilogy reveals that it also charts the progression of an internal invasion that expels all that is good, causing the protagonists to seek out other spaces through which to regain their identity and potency.

The inside/outside dichotomy is a dynamic factor reflecting the effect of politics on social relations. The house is, at first, a place of refuge from an increasingly dangerous outside in *al-Raj' al-Ba'id*. By the end, its status is ambiguous: for Munirah it becomes prison-like, and for Midhat, oppressive. Bachelard says that the home also reveals the world of our psyche. "The house becomes the real being of a pure humanity, which defends itself without ever being responsible for an attack . . . [it] is man's resistance; it is human virtue, man's grandeur."³³ In al-Takarli's novels, threats to culture, humanity and virtue are always present and the imagery of the house defines the state of mental resilience against those threats. This could be said of Hashim and the house in al-

Azamiyyah in the second novel and of Tawfīq and his aunt's house in Ḥaydar Khānah in the third.

The destructive success of the Ba'th Party in Baghdad affected the secure private life of 'Abd al-Razzāq's family. This is felt in the changed atmosphere of the old house, which supports its inhabitants by connecting them to their rich heritage in the old quarter, Bāb al-Shaykh. The house itself is not under threat, but the tension within it increases - Munīrah has to shut the door against 'Adnān, her rapist and an embodiment of the Ba'th Party. Although she keeps him out, the effect he has had on her leads to the break down in relations between the family and, indirectly, Miḍḥat's death. This idea is extended in the second novel by the loss of the family house in al-Azamiyyah, which is very close to Bāb al-Shaykh.

In *Khātam al-Raml*, the new family house in al-Ḥārithiyyah, which the protagonist inhabits, alienates him and becomes an object of revulsion. Al-Ḥārithiyyah was one of the areas of the city that had been redeveloped by the ruling regime. Being forced to desert his origins in this way, Hāshim represents the coerced majority of his nation, whose identities as Iraqis were being decimated and reformed in order to weaken any opposition. Hāshim's withdrawal from life is symbolised by his return to his old house in al-Azamiyyah and Ra'ūf's house, where he neither belongs nor is mentally able to move on. Like 'Abd al-Karīm's loss of the key to his house, Hāshim is unable to enter his house in al-Ḥārithiyyah because the main door had been firmly secured with an iron chain. Here, we feel the increasing encroachment of the state onto private space - the government was violating the simple lives of its people by cutting them off from familiarity and security.³⁴

³³ Gaston Bachelard, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

³⁴ For further discussion on how governments ideological use of space to reshape the identity of the people, see: Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist-or a Short Story History of Identity"; Kevin Robins, "Interrupting Identities: Turkey-Europe"; Paul du Gay, "Organizing Identity: Entrepreneurial Governance and Public Management"; James Donald, "The Citizen and the Man About Town", *op.cit.*, pp. 30-31, 61-82, 151-168, 184. See also Michael Ferber, *op.cit.*, pp. 100-101.

At this point, the bastion of the old values can no longer put up barriers against the new, and in fact, the Party is remaking buildings in its own, uncultured image. The second place of security was Hāshim's office at the architectural company. It is the place where Hāshim can exercise his creativity to resist the distortion of his city. Yet even there, he is stripped of his rights in the company by the group opposing him and attacked on the street by them. This is both a manifestation of the regime's attempts to beat the creative mind into submission and another example of physical violence replacing culture. It demonstrates how the realm of professional decision-making had become a political matter (externalised) - a theme that is continued in *Al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*.

Finally, the interior dimensions of *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* show buildings completely occupied by the aggressive party (as we see in Kamīlah's rape of Tawfiq in his own home - her house). The only escape from this corruption of values and aesthetic lies in escape to the margins of society, the old and tumultuous quarters, whose dilapidated houses offer some freedom from both the eye of the party and the restrictive social norms that would have prevented constructive relationships - such as those between Ghassān and Tawfiq and Tawfiq and Fathiyyah - from forming.

The development of the protagonist's mediation between the domestic and external worlds in all al-Takarlī's three novels underpins how successful the character is in negotiating life. In *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* Midhat's interaction with the interior world inside the family's house is greater than his interaction with the world beyond its threshold, even though he longs to escape its confines. This means that he is unprepared for confronting the violence of the city. For Hāshim, in *Khātam al-Raml*, the situation is reversed as he interacts more with the outside world than with that of his own home, in which he feels overwhelming fatigue. So whereas he has the skill to confront the elements of external destruction in a direct way in his capacity as an architect, he lacks the spiritual strength that a supportive domestic life and an authentic community might offer him. Tawfiq's situation in *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'* is different again, because he has

the ability to balance his interaction with the outside world in Baghdad and his inside world in all the houses where he lived. However, he succumbs to attack both in the workplace, at which point he is cast out from under his own roof and later, when he is arrested and beaten. It is only when he reaches this homeless, jobless state that he is able to begin to rebuild his life, question the trappings of status and social conformity, and chooses his associations and thus, his identity.

Points of Transition and Anchorage

The importance of the interactions between characters and his/her space is heightened by the use of numerous symbols in the three novels and these often emphasise the idea of conflict in people's representation of their identity through their interactions with the negative practices of the different governments in Iraq, especially that of the Ba'th. Symbols attached to the city's open spaces or to private spaces, which represent part of the historical heritage of the characters, help in anchoring their identity and can reveal the extent of the character's transformation.

Varieties of tree, including the fig tree, the olive tree, and the jujube tree (Sudrat al-Muntaha) which is known also by the name of Lote tree of the seventh Heaven. Munirah often appears near the olive tree in the courtyard of the family house and there is a jujube tree in the graveyard where Hāshim's mother is buried. These trees have considerable religious and historical significance in Islam, as well as in the old pagan religions of pre-Islamic Mesopotamia.³⁵ They are connected to the genesis of the world and to the birth of humanity. Al-Takarlı's references to these trees in Iraq emphasises the idea on which all these religions concur - that Iraq is the centre from which all the civilisations of humanity originally sprang - and he uses them in his writings as symbols

³⁵ Q 7: 18-27, Q 34: 16, Q 53: 14-18, Q 56: 27, Q 95: 1. For further information, see Abdallah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān, English translation and Commentary* (Presidency of Islamic Researches, al-Madinah al-Munawarah, 1410 H), pp. 152-153, 430, 526, 535, 597.

of how solid and deeply rooted the Iraqi identity is, as represented by the characters in his novels. This can be seen in this study's analysis of the trilogy, al-Takarī uses features of the city to refer to the noble descent of the Iraqis to embolden his people to confront the degradation they have endured and from which they are still suffering as a nation. This is why he uses these symbols in his novels whenever one of his characters is going through an ordeal and has to prepare himself or her-self for confrontation with it. Trees are also symbols of the Iraqi heritage in architecture. The big family house that contains olive and fig trees in the large open courtyard is representative of the old customs and family life - the tree is its traditional centrepiece or heart. This is a complex symbol, at times referring to the rottenness of rigid customs, at others, to the withering of this lifestyle. Moreover, the tree implies strength to be drawn from one's cultural roots and the possibility of new growth and fruition.

The window,³⁶ often indicates the desire to understand, or the longing for a better, more representative government and the restoration of their cultural heritage. Examples are: Midhat looking out of the window of Husaīn's room in the Kurdish quarter trying to take in his new surroundings and longing for his wife, and Hāshim surveying the architecture of modern Baghdad from the window of his office and wishing that many of the changes had not taken place.

The mirror is connected to self-perception and thus identity. It reflects the unembellished image of a person as he is here and now. A mirror can enable the person who looks into it to be aware of the aspects that are lacking in his personality; it does this by displaying and penetrating the body where each of us tries to hide the aspects of our weakness and insufficiency. It reveals how much we adapt and adjust to our own environment and to the ethnic group that we belong to biologically. It literally reflects the depth of the physical, mental and spiritual traces that are etched upon our bodies and

³⁶ For further information in this point, see Kevin Robins, "Interrupting Identities: Turkey-Europe", *op.cit.*, pp. 64,74-76,79-80.

connects us to our own people, history and culture - in other words it connects us to our visible identity. Throughout al-Takarlī's trilogy, the mirror is a kind of confrontation between a person and their true self,³⁷ as it is noticed in the case of Midḥat and Hāshim when they stand in front of the mirror in their rooms, respectively. The same thing can be said of Tawfīq when he catches his reflection in the corridor of his friend's office and in his brother's workshop.

The dreams of the characters in these novels are also vital in indicating the conflict between the individual and his society, especially if we take into account the fact that the dream is a desire that cannot be fulfilled in the real life of a character, because it may be opposed to the identity and morals of the character by whom it is expressed or because of its contrast with the culture of the society in which that character's lives.³⁸ Dreams that are the outcome of a severe event and are known as reaction-dreams might affect the character's mentality and mood. There are also telepathic dreams that have the property of prediction.³⁹

Dreams also reveal the transition that takes place in the identities of the protagonists and the other characters in the three novels when they come to encounter and interact with each other or with the circumstances that surround them in order to be accepted by each other, and to accept, to a certain extent, the reality that has been imposed in their lives by their government; for example 'Abd al-Karīm's dream about the police officer; Midḥat's dream about the autostrada and his dream about Munīrah; Tawfīq's dream about Adele, and his dream of Anwār.

³⁷ For further information, see: Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" and Marilyn Strathern, "Enabling Identity? Biology, Choice and the New Reproductive Technologies" and Nikolas Rose, "Identity, Genealogy, History" in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 9,11-12,37-50,128-129 and Michael Ferber, *op.cit.*, pp. 124-125.

³⁸ For further discussion, see Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998), pp. 16-21,42-47.

³⁹ For further discussion, see: Carl Gustav Jung, *Dreams*, translated by R. F. C. Hull (Routledge, London/New York, 2002), pp. 48-49 and M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

The dreams of a particular character are an indication of how that person accepts his life in the environment in which he is living, especially from the political and cultural aspects, as well as showing how he builds his relationship with his inner-self and with his soul, just as he builds his relationship with the community that surrounds him according to the social, religious and political rules that are accepted by that community.⁴⁰

A person's dream not only shows the history of his life, but in most cases it also shows the history of a whole community. Therefore, dreams show the extent to which the dreamer approves and resists the reality of his community, and the behaviour that he expects from the members of his community. These feelings, that may not be explicitly apparent to the dreamer during the day in the daily routine of his life, may enable him to discover other sides of his personality that he could develop.⁴¹

Map of the Past Leading to the Present: Directions for the Future

The protagonists of the three novels are alike in being confronted by the same private and public pressures in their lives on a daily basis, that lead to their transformation.⁴² The novels depict the physic states of their three protagonists by the actions and the choices that are made by them in the places that are physically influenced and altered by the major events that were taking place because of the government's negative practices. We realise that geography is a metaphor for the Iraqi psyche, but more than that, the political and social manipulation of space and environment have given rise to the imbalances and paranoia in the mental state of the individual. This, in turn, has a negative affect on culture. As we see time and again throughout the trilogy, violence is used as a substitute for creativity. The remedy that al-Takarli is suggesting as a cure to

⁴⁰ For further information, see Nikolas Rose, "Identity, Genealogy, History", op.cit., pp. 129-131,141.

⁴¹ For further discussion, see Elizabeth Wright, op.cit., pp. 16-21 and Carl Gustav Jung, op.cit., pp. 25-65.

⁴² For further information, see M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, op.cit., pp. 111-129.

this negative mental state is a recognition of and reverence for the culture of the past, as well as upholding old values, casting off those no longer appropriate.

Finally this study reinforces the idea of al-Takarli's trilogy being " 'a total invention with delusory approximations to historical reality.'"⁴³ Considering that the trilogy's main subject is the transformation of the contemporary history of Baghdad, the trilogy stands out as a kind of a "whole literature and consciousness of the area which is itself a collectivity - the coffeehouses and the shoemaker and the brassmaker - a vocational artisanal community,"⁴⁴ that portrays Baghdad as it is today and through it the rest of Iraq.

⁴³ Laurence Lerner, "History and Fiction", *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, Dennis Walder (ed.) (Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 334.

⁴⁴ Edward Said, *Power, Politics and Culture*, edited and with an introduction by Gauri Viswanathan (London, Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 123.

Appendix:

A letter from Fu'ād al-Takarlī

A letter containing the following biographical information was sent to me from Fu'ād al-Takarlī via Professor Sabry Hafez on 19 May, 2004. Facts are given in the order cited in the letter:

1927: Born in the old neighbourhood of Bāb al-Shaykh, Baghdād.

Educated in Baghdad schools and graduated from Iraq Law school in 1949.

Appointed in Baqubah courts until 1953 when he settled in Baghdad.

1951: First published in *al-Adīb*, a Lebanese Journal.

1948: Completed a novella entitled *Başqah fī Wahj al-Ḥayhah*, which was later published in the year 2000.

1960: Published first collection of short stories *al-Wajh al-Akhar*.

1966: Began writing *al-Raj' al-Ba'id* while studying law in France. The book was finished in Baghdad 1977 and was published in Beirut.

1956: Appointed as judge and remained in robes till 1983 following a decision to retire in order to dedicate time to writing.

1982: *Al-Wajh al-Akhar* was reprinted in Baghdad.

1986: *Al-Şakhrāh* was published.

1995: *Al-Kaf* was published in Tunisia.

1990: Left for Tunisia and wrote *Khātam al-Raml*, which was later published in Beirut in 1995 by Dār al-Ādāb. Then began writing *al-Masarrāt wal-Awjā'*, which was published in 1998 by Dār al-Madā in Damascus.

2002: Complete works published by Dār al-Madā in Damascus.

2004: Published a collection of short stories in *Khāzin al-lā-Mar' iyyāt*.

2003: Moved to Damascus where he resides today.

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